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THE HORRIFIC ACTION OF TIMO TJAHJANTO

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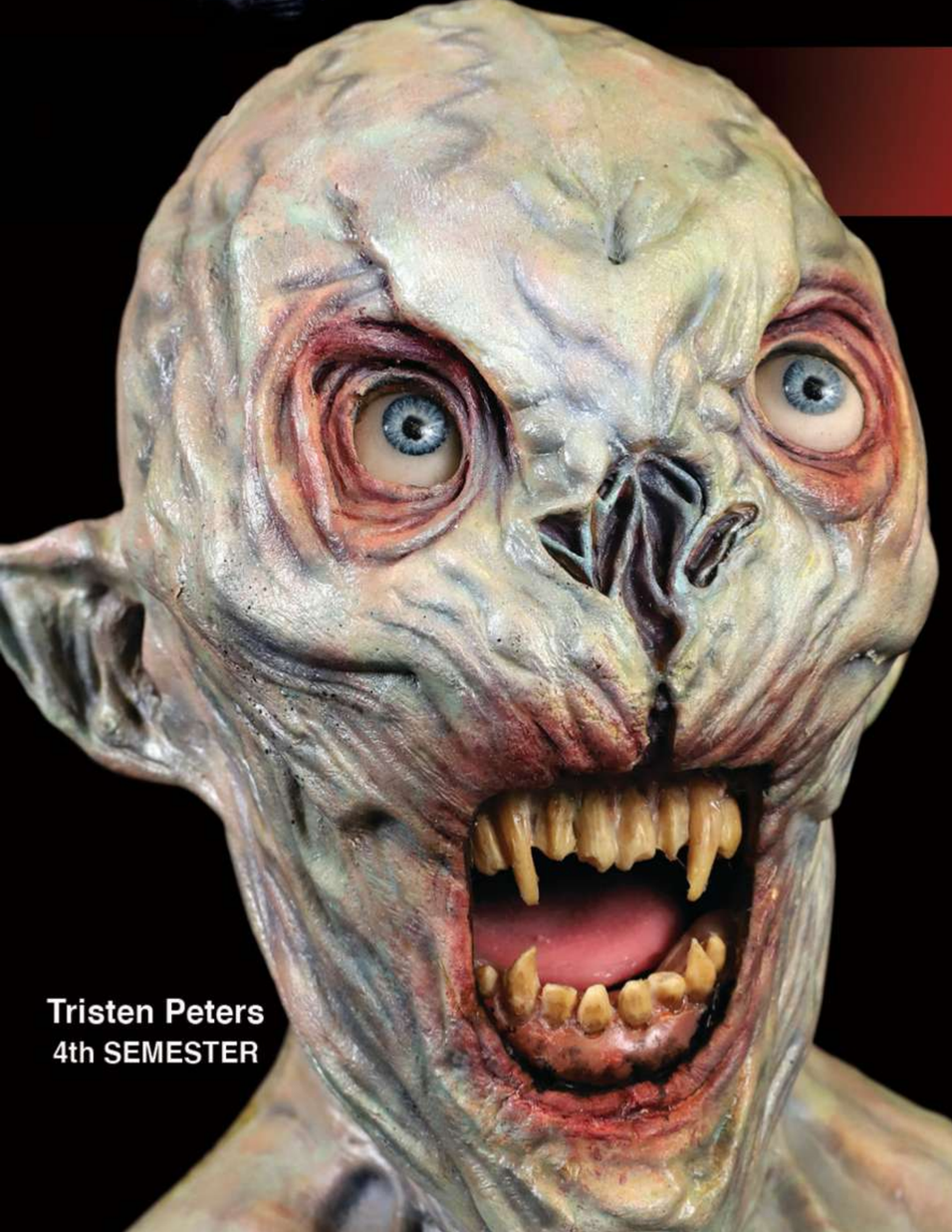

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This issue is dedicated to Mitchel Gomes.

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INVOCATION

Invisible Monsters

Despite what its trailers are selling, Ti West's *X* is (spoiler alert) a very angry film about America's head-in-the-sand approach to the desires and the agency of the aged. Though it is a bona fide, legitimate slasher movie, it's also a film that's asking questions about not just how we treat, but how we *regard* our elderly. And it explores how, in the name of our own convenience, we default to invalidating them past the point of humanity. *X* invites us to consider just why we do that, and gives us a confrontational dose of the anger — the utter *rage* — felt by those we treat a bit like monsters due to their age.

As this issue was going to press, my father-in-law Mitchel passed away at age 86. I don't want to trivialize the enormity of his passing in a magazine about horror movies, but he was a loyal subscriber, and this page was usually a lively topic of conversation between us. Every writer imagines one specific reader when they're writing, to make their writing better. For me, that was always my father-in-law. If you'll indulge me one last chat crafted with him in mind, I assure you he'd be on board as well.

Mitchel was in a lot of pain on the day he died, and it was tough to watch. Out of respect for him, I tried to fill myself up with awareness, attentiveness, recognition of what he was going through. And it was, minute for minute, one of the worst experiences of my life. I loved my father-in-law and hated seeing that decline, but it felt important to truly be *there* — important for him, for our family, and honestly, for myself. I wanted his last hours to be filled with as much dignity and respect as we could provide. He deserved that; everyone does.

And yet, we all know someone who's walled off, rendered invisible, or othered an old person into the margins, simply to facilitate their own day-to-day. We've probably all done it. *X* cleverly explores the toxic darkness we're inviting into our lives when we decide that someone is no longer useful, or when we decide that what they require outweighs what we believe they have to offer. That I watched this film less than a week before Mitchel's passing feels almost too much to be a coincidence, but I suppose the film's moral is, sooner or later, a universal one.

It's also a simple one: don't erase the people you don't want to think about just to make your inner life tidier. It might be tempting, it might even be loudly justified under the current me-first trend trumpeting itself as "self-care." But sweeping an entire group of people under the rug in order to not disrupt your own comfort crosses the line from self-care to abuse and — as West's film illustrates — you do so at your peril.

Thanks for reading, Mitchel. If it's okay with you, you'll still be my target audience when I write.

Phil Nobile Jr., Editor-in-Chief

The Postal Zone

People are always asking us how they can have their writing published in FANGORIA. Here you go!
This is your space to get heard, get loud and get opinionated. Brevity is preferred; having a point of view is required.
Hit us up at **MAIL@FANGORIA.COM**

LEGACY SEQUELS THAT NEED TO HAPPEN

If we are to accept that legacy sequels are here to stay, what long-dormant franchises would you like to see return to the silver screen? Obviously, Freddy and Jason (if the latter can sort out his legal troubles) are due a return, but we can go a little wilder. Give me a *Leprechaun* that reunites Warwick Davis and Jennifer Aniston in a meditative reflection on wealth and power; a *Wishmaster* that teaches Gen Z to be careful what they wish for (death by neverending viral TikTok dance anyone?); a *Re-Animator* that centers Barbara Crampton's Megan Halsey (miraculously re-re-animated) as she copes with the return of Herbert West to Miskatonic U.

Peace,
David Smyth

Oh, I thought you'd never ask. I got this:

1. Cropsy: The Burning II *(I feel like it'd have Roman numerals). Savini comes back and directs as well as oversees makeup FX. Jason Alexander returns as his character's twin brother.*
2. Tourist Traps. *A bevy of new beaus and beauties stumble upon Slausen's, where they're greeted by a deep-faked Chuck Connors, back as the telekinetic museum curator.*
3. Psycho II Too. *Gus Van Sant's 1998 remake was 24 years ago. That's one year longer than the gap between the original* Psycho *and its 1983 sequel. It's time. Vince Vaughn is back; Chris Landon directs.*

- PN

NEW BLOOD

Although I haven't seen *Titane* yet I must express how much I loved Lisa Dreyer's article in #13. What Lisa achieved is to move an article about an upcoming film past the promo puff we usually see and instead, they beautifully related the film to the queer experience. Thank you for giving writing like this a platform and for the fantastic magazine overall.

- Paddie Thompson

We're excited to have Lisa on board and we're glad you agree! She's stepped in again this issue, shining a light on a new film making the fest rounds on page 88. - PN

BURNING QUESTION

Are we ever going to see issues 345 thru 348 in print?

- KODY

Due to a tangle of logistical, practical and in some cases ethical hurdles, it is unlikely that those issues will see publication. It's a question that's dogged us since 2018, and we've explored options, but it's in all likelihood not happening. Sharp readers will note we've honored and acknowledged those fallen issues by continuing the issue numbering in the margins of the filmstrip on our covers. - PN

WANTED! MORE READERS LIKE:

Aubrey Andrews
(IG: @THATHORROR2)

YOU WON'T BE ALONE: The Most Mercurial Witch

By Brett Gallman

TALES OF SHAPESHIFTING AND WITCHCRAFT HAVE ENTRANCED AUDIENCES WITH THE UNCANNY EXPLOITS OF DECEPTIVE, MALEVOLENT FIENDS FOR CENTURIES. IT'S FITTING, THEN, THAT THE RECENT CINEMATIC RESURGENCE IN WITCHCRAFT AND FOLK HORROR HAS SHIFTED AND CONTORTED WITH EACH NEW INCARNATION. FILMS LIKE *THE WITCH*, *SUSPIRIA*, *HEREDITARY*, *GRETEL & HANSEL*, AND *MIDSOMMAR* MAY BE CONJURED FROM THE SAME FOLKLORIC MISTS, BUT THEY'RE NOT CARVED INTO THE SAME SHAPE. TO THAT END, WRITER/DIRECTOR GORAN STOLEVSKI HAS FASHIONED ANOTHER DISTINCTIVE VISION OF WITCHCRAFT WITH *YOU WON'T BE ALONE*, AN ELLIPTICAL ENTRY INTO THE CANON THAT EMBRACES TRANSFORMATION AS ITS SUBJECT RATHER THAN SIMPLY DEPLOYING IT AS A PLOT DEVICE.

In 19th-century Macedonia, Old Maid Maria (Anamaria Marinca), a disfigured, charred witch, makes a pact with a new mother. Instead of devouring her newborn child for its blood, she claims the girl as a bewitched daughter. Years later, the teenage Nevena (Sara Klimoska) is unleashed back into the world, where her adopted mother expects her to raise hell. Hesitant to embrace this fate, Nevena instead becomes fascinated with the people she encounters and strives to become more like them in the most literal sense: She steals their organs and swipes their skin, hijacking their identity as she learns what it means to become human.

Stolevski's clever hook emerges here, as several actors go on to inhabit the role of the

NEVENA (SARA KLIMOSKA) AND HER SINISTER ADOPTED MOTHER MARIA (ANAMARIA MARINCA).

PHOTOS COURTESY OF FOCUS FEATURES

curious witch. Far from a gimmick, it allows *You Won't Be Alone* to confront the act of shapeshifting, reimagining it as an engine of discovery and empathy rather than treachery. Nevena remains a child trapped in several different bodies, and Stolevski inverts the typical dynamic: Instead of inflicting horrors upon the world, the world visits its horrors upon this would-be witch, who endures brutality, alienation, love, lust, and loss in a search for identity.

"Connection and belonging are the core of the story," according to Stolevski, who hatched the story while living in London, where he found himself alone and alienated. Writing screenplays to fill up the time, he seized on the idea of witchcraft: "While researching, what struck me was that women who were accused of witchcraft were originally accused of taking the shape of another human or animal," he explains. "If you could do that, it would be an interesting way to look at life and gain a new perspective, so I explored how I would feel in that situation."

The first performer to take the baton from Kilmoska is Noomi Rapace. No stranger to horror fare, she admits that her frequent genre turns are no coincidence: "I'm drawn to nightmares. I like to explore them and go into the dark places of fantasy and imagination to see where it takes me." *You Won't Be Alone* took her to new, unexpected places, and Rapace admits the unique premise was alluring. "I've never been asked to do anything like that before, and it was very thrilling to bring that kind of character to life," she says. "Nevena is doing everything for the first time and using all of her senses to understand what it is to be human."

"I'm drawn to nightmares. I like to explore them and go into the dark places of fantasy and imagination to see where it takes me."

- Noomi Rapace

Rapace credits Stolevski with guiding the unconventional character development. Not only did he encourage improvisation, but he ultimately served as "the glue" in creating uniformity among the performers. "Goran gave us some keywords and guided us," she says, adding that he also "gave us a lot of freedom, but it feels like we were really moving and breathing together." Rapace also acknowledges cinematographer Matthew Chuang's role in capturing the intricacies of the character and performances: "He's an extraordinary person, and he was moving with me like I've never seen before. It was breathtaking to see the other actors take on what I started."

One of the film's most startling transformations belongs to Anamaria Marinca, whose performance as Old Maid Maria warps her into a crimson-faced boogeyman. The actress describes the four-hour makeup process as "the most radical physical transformation" she's ever experienced. She praises prosthetics designer Larry Van

FIRST-PERSON POSSESSIVE: NOOMI RAPACE'S VILLAGER IS INHABITED BY NEVENA.

Duynhoven and make-up artist Duda Vuksanovic for offering her the "freedom to play and explore." Like many roles that require prosthetics, the role proved to be a challenge. "I am not going to pretend it was easy for me, but it was good for the part," she says. "The best time was when I forgot I wasn't in my own skin, and I was entertained when people wouldn't recognize me and get scared."

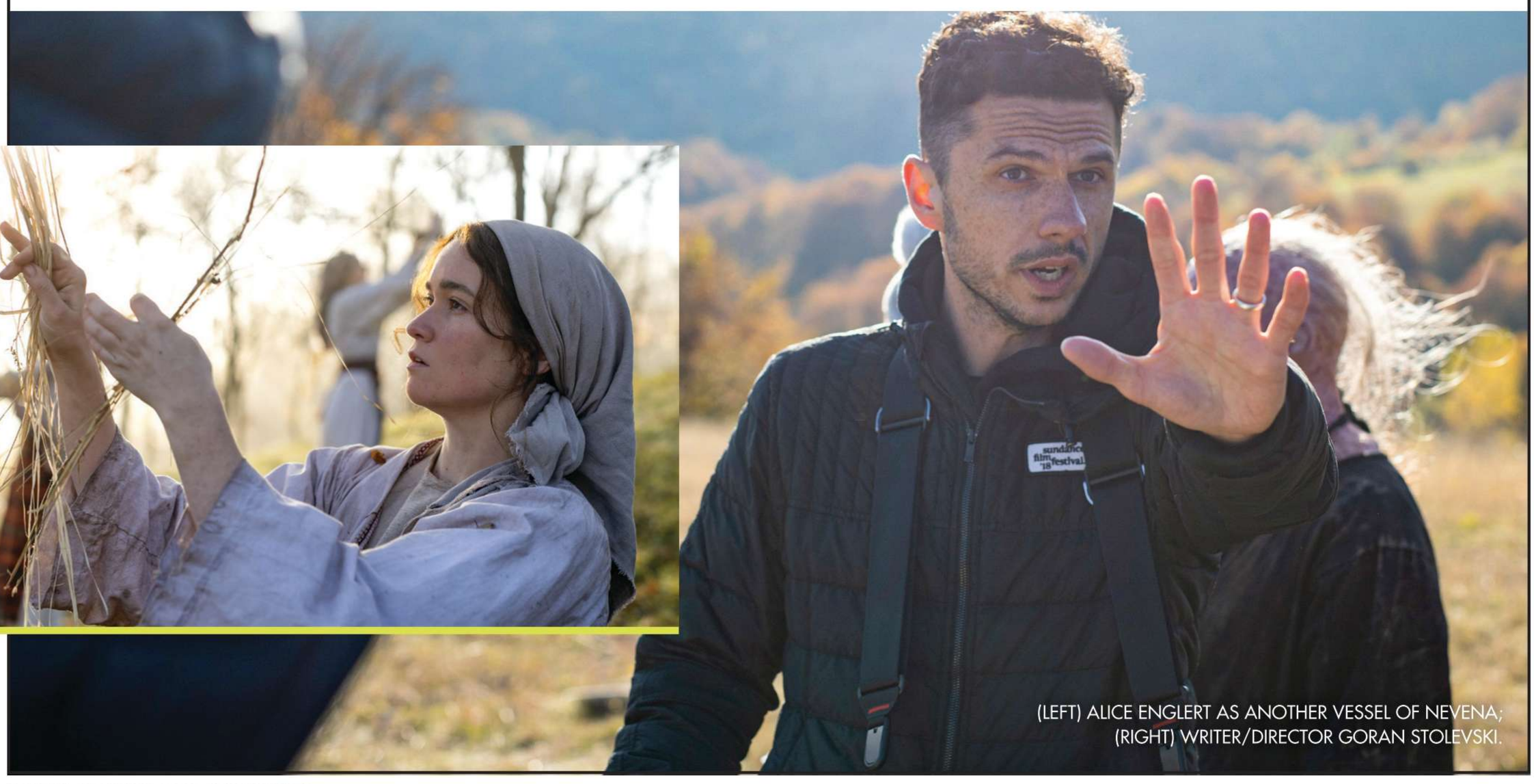
Throughout the film, Maria emerges as a figurative devil on Nevena's shoulder, seductively intoning her to abandon her quest and instead embrace her bewitching destiny. Crucially, however, Stolevski provides another glimpse of the woman before her turn to witchcraft, allowing Marinca to reveal a more human dimension to this complex character, something the actress appreciated. "It's such a gift to have a before and an after, particularly when the change is dramatic," Marinca says. "The incursion into Maria's past is emotional and redemptive, and it creates a terrifying arc with the present tense of the movie. It made me swallow swords, speak a language I don't understand, walk through fire, confess my sins. I felt alive."

During Nevena's journey, *You Won't Be Alone* transforms in tone, often transcending its expected genre trappings. While Nevena's transformations provide visceral body-horror shocks, much of the film unfolds in a hushed tenor, with a plaintive voiceover narration revealing her inner thoughts as she grows in and out of different sets of skins. Wistful pastoral scenes unfold during moments of tranquility, a style that's closer to Terrence Malick than it is to David Cronenberg. And while Stolevski admits to Malick being an "unconscious influence," he also took inspiration from a literary source. "The kernel of it started with Virginia Woolf," he says. "I wanted to capture that sense of a stream of consciousness and the internal feelings of someone through images the way she does with words."

You Won't Be Alone also distinguishes itself with its 19th-century Macedonian setting. Shot in nearby Serbia, the film hearkens back to a bygone era, with a period-accurate dialect that becomes entrancing. This setting and language are of personal interest to Stolevski, who wanted to preserve his native culture. "I witnessed a little bit of it," he explains. "When I was growing up, I would spend summers with my grandparents and I saw the dying remnants of this way of life." In addition to heightening the film's authenticity, recapturing the language also allowed Stolevski to embrace its beauty: "You want to be true to what you're doing, and I was trying to preserve the natural rhythm to it."

Stolevski admits this setting could mark *You Won't Be Alone* as an "esoteric, Eastern-European art film," but he hopes it will transcend its trappings, completing one last transformation into a timeless exploration of identity and connection. "As much as I wanted it to be specific to a time and place, I don't want it to be seen as an exotic thing. It's a universal film about the human experience."

Following its Sundance premiere, *You Won't Be Alone* goes into wide release on April 1st. 💀



(LEFT) ALICE ENGLERT AS ANOTHER VESSEL OF NEVENA; (RIGHT) WRITER/DIRECTOR GORAN STOLEVSKI.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF FOCUS FEATURES

PHOTOS BY: (TOP) KARA BAKER / (BOTTOM) MATT WILLIAMS

TALES FROM THE SUMMIT:

THE BIRTH OF OUTPOST

By Joe Lo Truglio

DYLAN BAKER, SUFFERING FOR HIS ART (AND FOR THE AUTHOR, RIGHT).

HELLO, FRIENDS. I MADE A HORROR MOVIE ON A MOUNTAIN, AND I'D LIKE TO TELL YOU ABOUT IT.

It was a lifetime in the making. *Jaws* had me drawing bloody limbs in crayon at five. Later, Cronenberg's *Brood* creatures stalked my dreams. FANGORIA bit me in the neck at 11 (*Halloween III* issue!), and I haven't shed its spell since. That was my life in 1982 (like many here). It's a sweet thrill to tell kindred souls about my first movie, in the greatest monster magazine ever. I goof off for a living, but now, with *Outpost* — my lifelong leap into the best genre in the world — I hope to weird out. I also hope to explain why now's a good time to get weird.

How do I describe *Outpost*? What can you expect from this movie?

During the four years it took to make, I gave soundbites: "It's a female *Shining*." "It's my *Repulsion*." But really, it's not like them at all. There are whiffs of both, to be sure, and traces of Kaufman's *Body Snatcher* paranoia. We've got *Jacob's Ladder*-esque imagery, and a creepy citadel à la *Amityville Horror* (flies, too!). Our composer, Steph Copeland, doles out Herrmann and Carpenter, Goldsmith and Goblin. At heart, *Outpost* is a fever dream made by a horror fan.

It's a vibe, in other words, a deep dive into a damaged mind. A story about a woman named Kate who tries to recover from a violent assault by taking a job as a fire lookout. She thinks the isolation and peace and quiet will do her good. Guess what, it doesn't. Her nerves are still taking punches. Our hero starts to lose her grip on what's real, and who to trust. To the dismay of her boss (Ato Essandoh), it begins to disrupt her ability to protect the town and his job. But Kate finds solace in a local hiker (Becky Ann Baker) and the friendship triggers a renewal unlike anything she's ever felt. The suspense of this movie lies in us watching Kate trying to help herself in all the wrong ways, like most of us do all the time. But her luck's been bad from the get-go. Can you love a world you're convinced hates you? How long before you hate it back?

I like horror movies about people slipping into madness. What if an act of violence crashes your nervous system? What if you think you can fix it alone, but find out too late you can't? And what if, while all that was happening, you were trapped in the middle of nowhere? *Outpost* is what can go horribly wrong when you roll the dice on self-care.

Summer of '94. I'm driving cross country with some buddies. One of us falls asleep behind the wheel, veers off the road. My body's violent tossing wakes me up. For years after, when I was asleep in a vehicle, if we hit a bump, turbulence even, I'd convulse awake in sheer terror. Heart racing. For *years*. That doesn't happen anymore, but it got me thinking: What if the event was more brutal? What if the aftershocks didn't stop? I became obsessed with the idea of being at the mercy of a nightmare. Your daily life hijacked. The monster is the *moment*. By the way, welcome to PTSD (some prefer PTSI), which millions of people suffer from. The threat is ever-present. When you drive, when you pee, when you buy milk.

This monster is born every day; we know that. The handsy uncle, the car that runs the red, the F5 tornado in the middle of the night. These psychic beasts shock the body; the body keeps the score. Unchecked, these ordeals distort reality, make one perceive things that aren't there, and confirm agendas that don't exist. That kills people. If *Outpost* is a sub-genre, maybe it's *traumatic horror*.

DYLAN BAKER LENDS A HAND.

THE AUTHOR AND KENNETH CALHOUN PREPPING AN UNFORTUNATE COYOTE (INTERIOR SEEN BELOW)

"Outpost" has me on all fours, bones cracking, fingertips splitting, face stretching into a snout. You won't recognize me here.

PHOTOS BY: (BACKGROUND, TOP AND BOTTOM LEFT) MATT WILLIAMS, (BOTTOM RIGHT) JOE LO TRUGLIO

MAKEUP FX ARTIST KENNETH CALHOUN.

THE AUTHOR AND CALHOUN OVERSEE SOME MAYHEM BETWEEN DALLAS ROBERTS AND BAKER.

Kate suffers from PTSD, too, and escapes to the wilderness. Historically, a place dominated by men. The boyfriend-creature she runs from is both real and not real. But no matter. This is primal terror. Terror of being hunted. Not so long ago we were tiny little shrews fleeing everything else. "*Run don't be food run don't be food run don't be food!*" Kate has that predator in her head, all the time. She can't outrun it. *Outpost* is lizard brain horror.

BECKY ANN BAKER'S ONSCREEN *OUTPOST* EXPERIENCE IS NOT A POSITIVE ONE.

This genre's a shapeshifter and a party crasher. It evolves constantly and shows up in places uninvited all the time. One of the billion things I love about it. It belongs to no one, but its DNA is in every single sucker out there. In that sense, I expect that the guy from *Superbad* and *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* will piss a lot of people off, because everyone will be waiting for the wink, and there is no wink. It never comes. *Outpost* has me on all fours, bones cracking, fingertips splitting, face stretching into a snout. You won't recognize me here.

We shot in July of 2021 (in Coolin, Idaho, and Spokane, Washington) on a 16-day schedule, with about 40 people, cast included. Half that time was spent at 6300 ft, at the summit of Sundance Mountain. Daily, it took us an hour up, an hour down. Hairpin switchbacks with sheer drop-offs kept the actors awake for the early calls. If this movie works at all, it's only because of them. My wife (and tortured hero Kate) Beth Dover gave me a lesson in grit. She's got a ton of it. My DP Frank Barrera, whom I've known since I was 17, and I agreed there was no reason to make this movie unless we shot in an actual tower. The reality of that choice spat in our face every day. Our first scout in 2019 had the whole tower in fog. We shot listed for over a year knowing we weren't even guaranteed a vista. Wind and bugs were regulars. Rogue gusts stole our tents. No cover sets if it rained. We fought reflections in 360-degree windows. Five-person weight limit at the top. Our gaffer had acrophobia. An actor, vertigo. Equipment got tied down nightly or lost. Overall, it took us three years to get there. Before that, we lost a producer and two stunt coordinators. In summer 2020, COVID blew us up two weeks before rolling. I had to wait *another* year. Like Kate, I was at the end of my rope and convinced the world was against me. Would I ever be heard? It nearly broke me. But also like Kate, I just fought harder, screamed louder.

There's redemption and ruin in this tale, but *Outpost* is mostly a story about pain, and what happens if you run from it. How it always catches up. How it will control what you see, what you hear. It governs what's real. It commands what you do. If you don't face your demons, the demons will come to face you.

I don't have to sell you on the idea that the last two years have been a flat-out horror show. Yet we're pretending it's not, we're pretending we're fine. You can expect *Outpost* to show you why that's super fucking dangerous. But perhaps it also reveals that surrendering to the pain is the way out. Maybe if we face how weird, how WTF we all feel right now, we'll survive this madness. I think Kate is the perfect symbol of the frenzy riding just under the surface of things here in the early 2020s. This untethered feeling is rampant in *Outpost* and, weirdly, I think it'll help people connect to it. We're all twisting in the wind, with only each other to hang onto. Don't choose to be alone out there. Bad things will find you. Think of *Outpost* as a trembling, out-stretched hand.

It would be so lovely if you took it. 💀

PHOTOS BY MATT WILLIAMS

Michael Gingold's
Exordium

TV OR NOT TV

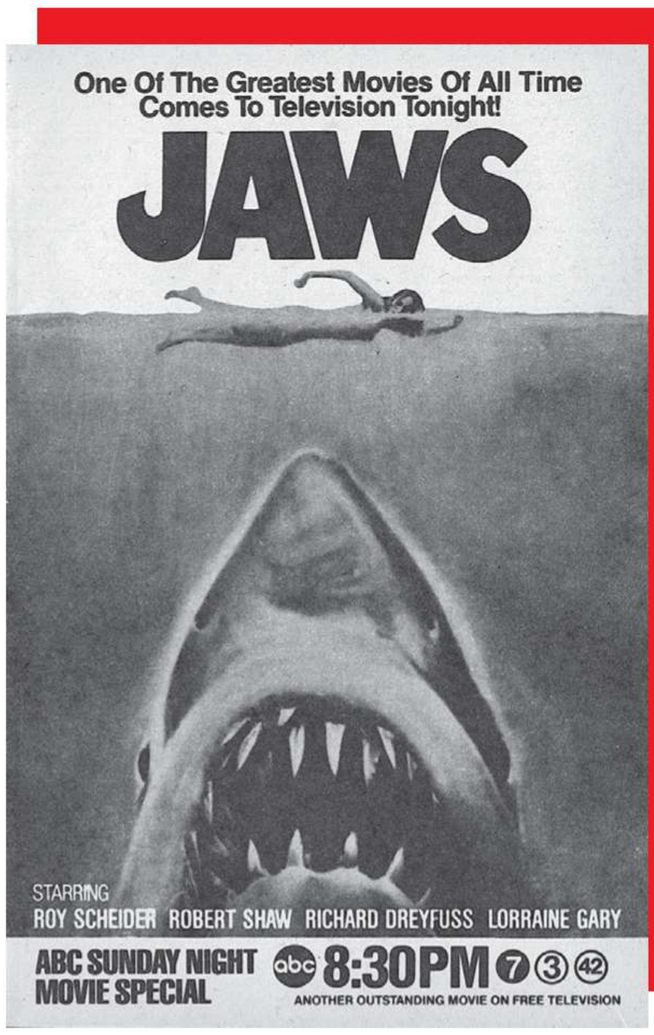
I can't remember the movie for sure (it may have been *Zombie Holocaust*), but the lesson has stuck with me all these years. Back in the boom days of Eurohorror on U.S. DVD, when we were first getting to witness widescreen uncut editions of films by Dario Argento, Lucio Fulci et al., I was at the house of my friend and Italian fright film buff Chris Alo for a movie party one night. We were in the middle of one disc when somebody in the room began griping about the look of the transfer — the color was off or the cropping was wrong or some such nitpick.

At that point, Chris stopped the disc, went to his shelves and pulled out a VHS containing a bootleg — likely a second- or third-generation one — of the same movie that he had once bought at a convention. He put the tape on, and as the grainy, murky picture crawled across the TV screen, he said, "Remember when we used to be thrilled to have *this*?"

And he was right. Compared to even five years or so before, when fans of foreign and independent terror had to make do with often sub-grade tape transfers, we were being spoiled at that point. The movies were finally being released Stateside by companies that respected them, put them out in their proper aspect ratios from the best possible source materials, and supplemented them with commentaries, on-camera interviews and other bonus features. And yet there were still a few fans who couldn't appreciate how good they had it.

That's still true today, and if you'll allow me to slip into get-off-my-lawn mode, I flash back to that night at Chris' place when I read certain online comments directed at new

THE NO-LONGER ELUSIVE *ALLIGATOR*.


One Of The Greatest Movies Of All Time
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JAWS
STARRING
ROY SCHEIDER ROBERT SHAW RICHARD DREYFUSS LORRAINE GARY
ABC SUNDAY NIGHT MOVIE SPECIAL
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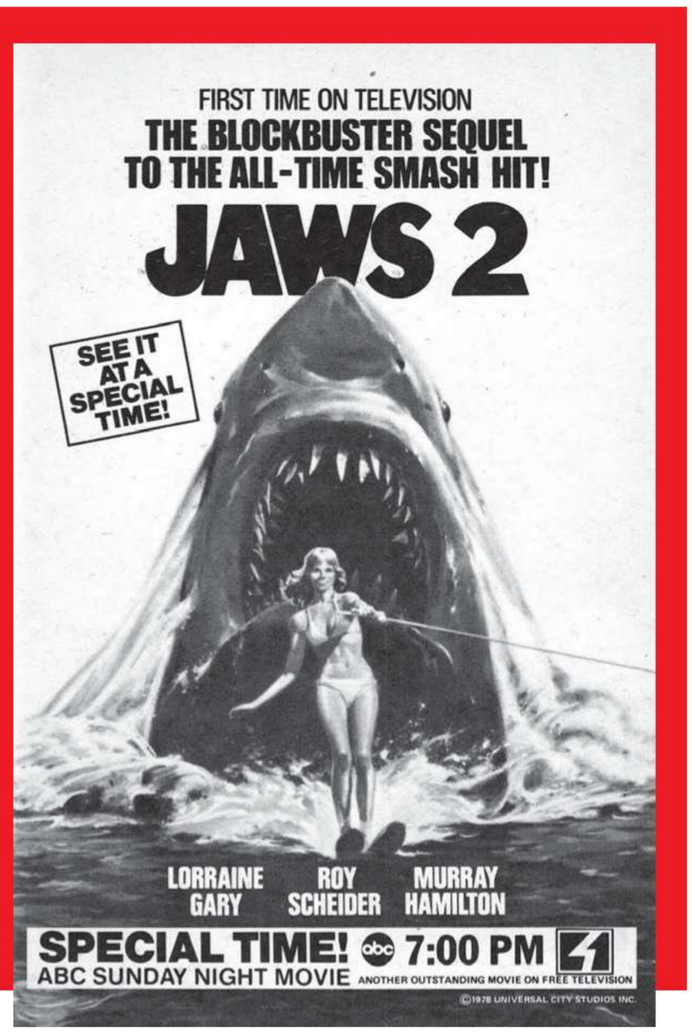
ANOTHER OUTSTANDING MOVIE ON FREE TELEVISION



Blu-ray releases. These hi-def discs are steps (sometimes many steps) beyond past DVDs in terms of visual quality, and still can't catch a break from the perfectionist devotees out there in the world. These kids today, with their Blu-rays (and occasional 4K UHDs), not to mention streaming features, available at the click of a mouse — they don't know how lucky they are. Sure, I love the fact that I own a sweet-looking Blu-ray of Narciso Ibañez Serrador's *Who Can Kill a Child?*, one of my all-time favorite Eurohorrors. But it is, in a sense, not as satisfying as that feeling I had when I first got a hold of a VHS sporting a slightly blurry but still watchable transfer of the uncut film, and not the badly truncated U.S. edition titled *Island of the Damned*.

Believe me, I'm not complaining about the fact that I can now watch even the most obscure low-budgeter polished to a sheen comparable to the latest Marvel blockbuster. It's just that some people out there seem to take that opportunity for granted, and today, the pleasure of convenience has replaced the thrill of the hunt — the excitement of poring over convention vendor tables and through Xeroxed mail-order catalogs looking for that one especially desired title, or discovering some heretofore unknown but suddenly intriguing flick. And going back a little bit further, there were the early days of cable movie channels as well as the network and syndicated stations, which were the only way to see movies you either missed in theaters or were too young to attend (or you had not yet been born) at the time.

Thoughts of these and that night at Chris' place were sparked by Shout! Factory's release this past February of the long-awaited Blu-ray of Lewis Teague's *Alligator* — and not just because Chris is the only person I know who owns Ideal's ultra-rare *Alligator* game, which has always given me a case of collector's envy. By coincidence, Shout!'s special Scream Factory three-disc set streeted two weeks before the 40th anniversary of *Alligator*'s TV premiere, as The ABC Sunday Night Movie on March 7, 1982. That was the first time I, and a lot of other people, first got to see Teague and John Sayles' perfect blend of nature-amok thrills and satirical humor. Despite receiving a number of rapturous reviews, *Alligator* didn't break out at the box office, but it was a ratings monster for ABC.

I was excited to watch it that night, even visually cropped, shorn of its gorier moments, and interrupted by commercials. Same goes for the independent and foreign fear flicks I would catch on the tube deep into the night, staying up late after discovering them listed in *TV Guide* magazine. One of the great youthful rituals lost in the march of time and technological advancements was going through the Movie Guide in that digest-sized publication, where you could find out every film airing during the coming week on the then-limited number of network and syndicated (and later, cable) stations, and plan your schedule accordingly.

We didn't know that one day, we'd be able to view these flicks on home screens looking every bit as good (and sometimes better) as they had in theaters; we were just happy to see them at all. And although we knew we weren't seeing the original versions of the movies, which had to lose violent and sexy moments to appease Standards and Practices, every so often we would get bonus material. Years before deleted scenes became among the most popular special features on disc releases, cut footage would be dropped back into certain films on TV to help them fill time slots. One example, in fact, was *Alligator*, which had several minutes reinstated by ABC (they're included in that Blu-ray package). That network also restored footage to *Jaws* and *Jaws 2* for airings of the Steven Spielberg classic and its sequel, including an earlier introduction of Robert Shaw's Quint in the original. It was even a selling point when the 1976 *King Kong* had about an hour of additional scenes added when it made its broadcast premiere as a two-night event on NBC; a shorter but still extended variation later aired in single-night three-hour slots. And I can still recall taking in a cable-TV showing of *The Stepfather* late one night, and seeing a number of scenes not present in the big-screen release — or any subsequent discs.

Then there was the big surprise New York-area fans got in 1982, when a local station aired *Friday the 13th* and *Friday the 13th Part 2* late on a couple of Saturday nights. When I tuned in, I was startled to see both movies shown in their practically intact theatrical versions — a bit of sensuality missing, but the gore untouched. Yes, the duo had already been available in their R-rated glory on cable movie networks, but this was a channel where even the word "ass" had to be blipped at the time. While it's great to have pristine letterboxed versions of the *Friday*s on my shelf and online, taking advantage of those can't match that little bit of joy — a sense of getting away with something — of witnessing those bloody bits in a medium where I didn't expect them all those years ago. 💀

SceneQueen

SAINT OR SINNER

WHAT'S MORE FUN TO FILM: PLAYING A GOOD GIRL OR THE BAD GAL?

BY BARBARA CRAMPTON

When I was in my first acting class in college, my professor gave me a piece of advice I carry with me to this day. With each new role, a performer should ask herself the question: "If I were this character in this situation, what would I do?" This approach helped me understand that there are no wrong choices, only different ones in deciding how to play a character.

Each performer always carries a bit of themselves in any situation on screen. That's why no two actors will play a role the exact same way. Actors must reveal themselves to their viewers as authentically as possible to have any impact in a performance. Good actors are mini psychologists. They need to truly understand an emotion or motive to illuminate it believably on screen. A brilliant performance requires the actor to go deeply into a role, fusing their own personality with that of the person they're playing, creating a complex tapestry made up of the inner workings of the character alongside the nuances of the performer's personal point of view. A great actor should be able to play any role: saint or sinner and everything in between.

But in horror, where our most valuable currency is the question of good vs. evil, actors who give a particularly memorable performance as one or the other will often find themselves cast in a similar vein for the rest of their careers. My most frequent co-star Jeffrey Combs slithered onto the scene with his iconic turn as Herbert West in *Re-Animator*, setting into motion a series of roles as unusual antagonists. Actors like Robert Englund, Tony Todd and Brad Dourif continue to do good work in all genres and character types, but audiences often think of them mostly in terms of how much they once terrified us.

The same is true of our horror heroines, those who win our hearts with their good nature and impressive survival skills. We don't typically see actors like Dee Wallace, Heather Langenkamp or Neve Campbell in bad guy roles. It's not often that an actor can work continuously as both protagonist and antagonist. Audiences and executives like to pigeon-hole us as one thing.

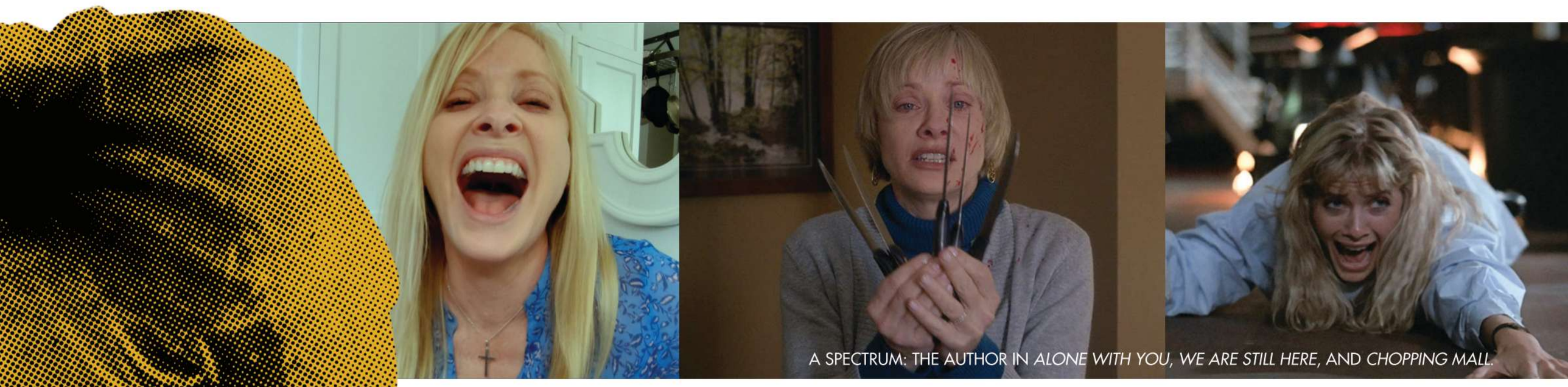
I came onto the horror scene playing the strong and cheerful Megan

Halsey in *Re-Animator*. In subsequent roles in *From Beyond*, *Chopping Mall*, *We Are Still Here* and *You're Next*, I continued to play likeable characters who were easy to root for. That was my niche. But recently, I've been fortunate to play a few slightly sinister roles, and it's been oddly refreshing. Do I enjoy being mean? Have I always been a character actor trapped in a horror heroine's body, or have I just been unleashed in this latter part of my career? After playing sweet for so long, sour is an acquired taste that I find I'm enjoying. And I think part of the reason I have been able to play both of late is that I don't mind playing a smaller role to support a project I think is worthy.

After my comeback movie, *You're Next*, I was offered the part of a woman of questionable motivations in 2015's *Sun Choke*. In this little-seen indie horror film, I had the opportunity to flex my acting muscles as an abusive spinster caretaker named Irma. I really enjoyed the challenge of an unsympathetic role, and I wanted to continue to stretch my boundaries, accessing that part of myself that may be less than nurturing. I found reasons to justify Irma's bad behavior in ways I imagine someone in real life might do. I knew there must be something more behind Irma's cruelty, and I decided her loneliness impacted how she treated the young girl she was entrusted to care for in the film.

I then went on to play a supportive Mother Superior in the comedy drama *Little Sister* and a scared yet caring wife in Abner Pastoll's thriller *Road Games*. It wasn't until *Beyond the Gates* that I played a truly villainous person, an unholy video game host named Evelyn. Did I worry that fans might not accept me as someone so malevolent? A little. But my desire to play a different side of humanity was stronger than my fear. I based Evelyn on how Barbara Steele holds herself in *Black Sunday*, her powerful, penetrating gaze never blinking. Evelyn was unequivocally evil.

I was then tapped to play two more nefarious roles in *Replace* and *Dead Night*, an evil doctor experimenting on young victims and a bad politician bringing demons back from the dead. But it was my role as a spying sexual therapist in the final season of *Channel Zero* that I think made audiences accept that I could be both naughty and



A SPECTRUM: THE AUTHOR IN *ALONE WITH YOU*, *WE ARE STILL HERE*, AND *CHOPPING MALL*.

Recently, I've been fortunate to play a few slightly sinister roles, and it's been oddly refreshing.

PHOTO COURTESY OF RLJE FILMS

SAINTS AND SINNERS: CRAMPTON IN *SUPERHOST* (ABOVE) AND *SUN CHOKE* (BELOW).

nice. All of a sudden people were calling me to play the mean, older lady. I didn't complain. I relished the part of a cult leader in *Sacrifice*, a shameless "Karen" in *Creepshow*, a vengeful Airbnb host in *Superhost*, and two unforgiving and judgmental mothers in *Alone with You* and *King Knight*. It seems I've found my new calling...

As an actress gets older, there are often fewer leading roles, and many of my villainous characters were smaller roles than I'm used to playing. *Jakob's Wife* was an exception, as I developed the project as a vehicle for myself. I'd wanted to play a classic monster all my life, and who was going to give me this part if I didn't give it to myself? *Jakob's Wife* afforded me the chance to play a blood-sucking monster – but she had her reasons, of course. The film was actually more about a marriage than a monster. Anne was a mature antagonist with feelings and desires and good reasons for tearing the neighbor's head off in a torrent of blood.

So what's better, playing a good girl or a bad girl? I loved being the voice of reason in my collaborations with director Stuart Gordon, underscoring how someone should behave in grave situations, continuing to be supportive and kind, no matter the stakes. I strive to do that in my own life, as I think we all do. Even with all of the bad in the world, I believe in the goodness of people, and to showcase that on screen has been my ultimate privilege.

But it's been thrilling to tap into another side of the human psyche. With all the sinners I've played lately, it gives me a greater understanding of why people do the horrible things they do. With each performance, I had to find empathy for this wicked character, to understand where their unworthy actions came from. I believe all characters are seeking love and acceptance. Some are able to give it, and some want to take it away from others. Evil will never be eradicated, but maybe it can be understood.

Going forward, I'll continue to try to bring understanding and compassion to the moral or immoral characters I play, large parts or small. I just want to keep playing. 💀

ROBERT EGGERS ON THE NORTHMAN

BY MICHAEL GINGOLD

Robert Eggers' previous horror films *The Witch* and *The Lighthouse* took us out of our modern comfort zones and into, respectively, a woodland in 1630s New England and a remote island in the 1890s. For his third feature, *The Northman* (coming April 22 from Focus Features), he travels back even further to the Viking Age, to tell an elemental story of bloody revenge derived from a classic Norse saga. Alexander Skarsgård stars as Prince Amleth, who in childhood witnessed the murder of his father, King Aurvandil (Ethan Hawke). As an adult, he sets out on a vengeance quest against the culprit: his own uncle Fjölnir (Claes Bang), who has taken Amleth's mother, Queen Gudrún (Nicole Kidman), captive. Sharing script duties with Icelandic author Sjón and reuniting with such past collaborators as cinematographer Jarin Blaschke (who was Oscar-nominated for *The Lighthouse*) and production designer Craig Lathrop, Eggers tackles his biggest canvas yet in *The Northman*, which nonetheless promises the same kind of stark, dramatic intensity that has distinguished his prior work.

PHOTOS: AIDAN MONAGHAN / © 2022 FOCUS FEATURES, LLC

WHAT MAKES HORROR SET IN PAST CENTURIES SO INTRIGUING TO YOU?

I don't know why I'm so fascinated with the past, but the horror films I grew up watching were Universal and Hammer horror movies. So that Gothic sensibility is just something that I prefer. And I also feel that it's easier for me to invest in the supernatural side of a story when it's set in a world where the supernatural exists in everyone's mind. Like, *The Witch* only works because it's in 17th-century New England; it wouldn't work today, you know?

WHERE DID THE INITIAL INSPIRATION FOR THE NORTHMAN COME FROM?

Alexander Skarsgård wanted to meet for lunch, and he mentioned that he and Lars Knudsen, who was a producer on *The Witch* and is a friend of mine, had been trying to develop a Viking movie for quite some time. I somehow didn't know about this, and I told Alex I had a Viking movie for him — which was not totally true, but a couple of years prior, I'd gone to Iceland on vacation with my wife, and it kindled the idea of making a Viking movie in Iceland at some point. My wife is really into old Norse literature, and she had been trying to encourage me to read the sagas, and after that trip, I did.

So from that meeting and that trip, I decided I needed to do a Viking revenge movie. Very quickly, using the saga of Amleth, which is the prototype of *Hamlet*, seemed to make a lot of sense, because I could have a story everyone is familiar with — everybody knows *Hamlet*, everybody knows *The Lion King* — and I could come up with something commercial and digestible, while still diving into the material world and mindset and culture of the Viking Age, and have that be more unique. The other major piece of this was that I wanted to work with the Icelandic novelist and poet Sjón, and thought he would be the best writing partner for this project.

(THIS PAGE AND PREVIOUS) ALEXANDER SKARSGÅRD DISPLAYS A RANGE OF RAGE AS AMLETH.

"I BELIEVE YOU'LL SEE THAT I CUT MY TEETH ON HORROR MOVIES WHEN YOU WATCH THIS FILM. I THINK THERE'S ENOUGH FOR THOSE KINDS OF GENRE FANS TO ENJOY."

- Robert Eggers

PHOTOS: AIDAN MONAGHAN / © 2022 FOCUS FEATURES, LLC

ARE THERE ANY THEMES HERE THAT CARRY OVER FROM *THE WITCH* AND *THE LIGHTHOUSE*?

There's my interest in religion and mythology, and also the verisimilitude of creating or recreating a past, a material past. That's much more challenging when something happened 1,000 years ago and there's not all that much evidence, whereas with *The Lighthouse*, there were photographs of period lighthouse stations. Even some of the experts I was fortunate to work with on *The Northman*, the real Viking scholars, were divided about certain things.

DOES *THE NORTHMAN* HAVE ELEMENTS OF THE HORROR GENRE IN IT?

Yeah. I mean, it's definitely not a horror movie, though there is some gore and there are some horror beats. And I believe you'll see that I cut my teeth on horror movies when you watch this film. I think there's enough for those kinds of genre fans to enjoy.

BEYOND WHAT WE'VE SEEN IN THE TRAILER, WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT SKARSGÅRD'S CHARACTER?

A major story beat that's not so clear from the trailer is that when we come back to him as an adult, he hasn't stuck with that [revenge] mantra that plays all through that preview. He needs to unstick himself from the life that he's chosen to then return to his goal of vengeance. But he gets back there pretty quickly [*laughs*].

YOU REUNITE WITH *THE WITCH*'S ANYA TAYLOR-JOY HERE. WAS HER ROLE WRITTEN FOR HER?

Yeah, for sure. It was an absolute pleasure to be working with Anya again, and I hope to continue our collaboration. She plays an enslaved Slavic woman named Olga, who has some white-witchy powers.

IS THAT WHERE SOME OF THE HORROR ELEMENTS COME IN?

Well, some of those have to do with other mythological and old Norse stuff, but she certainly deals a little bit in sorcery. Just don't get too excited [*laughs*]; she's not that crazy. We've also got Claes Bang, whom your readers might readily know as the star of the recent BBC *Dracula*, as the villainous uncle, Willem Dafoe [from *The Lighthouse*] as Heimir the Fool, who's both a kind of Viking jester and a keeper of secret knowledge, and Björk as a seeress in a Slavic village.

HOW DID YOU END UP CASTING BJÖRK? SHE'S AN INTERESTING CHOICE.

Well, no one's gonna play an oracle better than Björk! I know her a little bit, and she has a close relationship with Sjón, so we talked quite a lot before she decided to take the plunge.

YOUR PREVIOUS TWO MOVIES ARE VERY CONTAINED, INTERIOR STORIES. WAS IT REFRESHING OR A CHALLENGE TO TACKLE A MUCH BIGGER CANVAS HERE?

It was much, much more challenging, but my collaborators and I were fortunate to have an incredible team of very experienced people working with us. I had the same heads of department from my last two films, for the most part, but then under them, everyone had worked with Ridley Scott, or on *Game of Thrones*, James Bond and Harry Potter movies, so we had really skilled technicians and craftspeople to pull off what we were imagining. But just having a larger cast was hard; I mean, I spent so much of my prep time just emailing with all the actors, because there were so many of them.

THAT'S CLAES BANG AS FJÖLNIR UNDER THERE, WE SWEAR.

AMLETH (SKARSGÅRD) AND OLGA (ANYA TAYLOR-JOY) — AND YOU — ARE ABOUT TO ENCOUNTER THE FREAKIEST VIKING ADVENTURE EVER.

GIVEN THE BIGGER SCALE AND CAST, HOW WAS IT HANDLING ALL THAT IN THE MIDST OF THE PANDEMIC?

We were one of the first films back after the lockdown, and that created a lot of extra challenges. There were some ways in which it made working more efficient, but many more ways where it was less so. One of the very simplest things is when you're dealing with actors, and working on getting performances, you need to have this trusting relationship. And with the masks, sometimes our eyes weren't communicating everything we wanted to communicate, so adjusting to working with the masks in that setting was difficult.

But one thing we benefited from, which a lot of films did, was being able to prepare more. During the lockdown, most of the people on the crew were not working, and Jaren Blaschke and the storyboard artist Adam Pescott and I were continually figuring out the visuals. We had pretty much everything ready to go by the time we went to camera, and we wouldn't have had that luxury otherwise. Also, the sets got to gestate, and look more lived-in and authentic, so there were certainly some benefits. But it was definitely difficult.

DID YOU SHOOT THE NORTHMAN ON LOCATION IN ICELAND?

We actually filmed most of it in Northern Ireland. The beginning of the story takes place in the Viking diaspora on an island north of Scotland, so Northern Ireland suited us very well for that. Then we found an area that looked like it could be farmland in the south of Iceland, where we built our main village, if you will; it's really a farm. But we did shoot some in Iceland, so there's Ireland pretending to be Iceland, and then there's Iceland as Iceland.

HOW EPIC DOES THE ACTION GET, AND HOW MUCH OF THAT WAS DIGITALLY AUGMENTED AS OPPOSED TO BEING ACTUALLY STAGED FOR THE CAMERA?

All the stunts were done live; there's no digital crowd extension in any of the battle sequences. There's really only one scene with a little bit of that kind of extension, which was fortunate for us, given COVID. But the film is done in a sequence of very long takes, for the most part, and some of those takes have hidden cuts, so that's where we have our digital manipulation. And there are shots in the trailer of a sword fight on a volcano, which we shot outdoors on a volcano set, but obviously the magma is augmented. So the fights are practical, though there's nothing like in *Game of Thrones* or *Lord of the Rings* where there are thousands of Vikings and naval ships; we're not on that scale.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT THE VIKING PERIOD THAT ESPECIALLY FASCINATES YOU?

What got me interested in this stuff was initially just the country of Iceland, and the idea that people moved there and lived there astonished me. And the power of the landscape was inspiring. Then, when I started reading the sagas, I was so taken by how immediate and human they were, and how — and this is what I like about exploring other periods — even though their way of thought is so far from how we think about things today, you can still find it to be very relatable, and they're utterly human. Also, the pagan practices, which we only know so much about, are particularly of interest to me, and the material culture is beautiful — some of the wood carvings, and their famous longships are quite sophisticated. So it's this advanced, poetic, artistic, musical culture that was also existing in an incredibly brutal time. While most Vikings were farmers, we think of Viking warriors and raiders for a reason, and it's called the Viking Age for a reason, because they were all over the place, winning, you know? It's kind of horrifying.

THE SORCERER (INGVAR SIGURDSSON) AND FRIEND. WHEN EITHER ONE TALKS, YOU LISTEN.

PHOTOS: AIDAN MONAGHAN / © 2022 FOCUS FEATURES, LLC

TALKING ABOUT THE ICONOGRAPHY. WHENEVER SOMEONE SAYS "VIKINGS," PEOPLE THINK OF HORNED HELMETS AND CARVED DRAGONS ON THE FRONT OF THE SHIPS. HOW MUCH OF THAT IS AUTHENTIC, AND SEEN IN *THE NORTHMAN*?

Well, everything is based on archaeological finds, and discoveries that can be bolstered by old Norse texts. The dragon ships were 100 percent a Viking thing, but the horned helmet was not really part of Viking culture. There was a horned headdress that is prominent iconography before the Viking age, in Scandinavian and Germanic tribes, but we see just a tiny little bit of it carried on into the Viking Age in ceremonial function. And there is one of those headdresses that appears in the trailer.

YOU AND TAYLOR-JOY HAVE PLANNED TO RETEAM AGAIN ON A NEW VERSION OF *NOSFERATU*. WHERE'S THAT PROJECT AT RIGHT NOW?

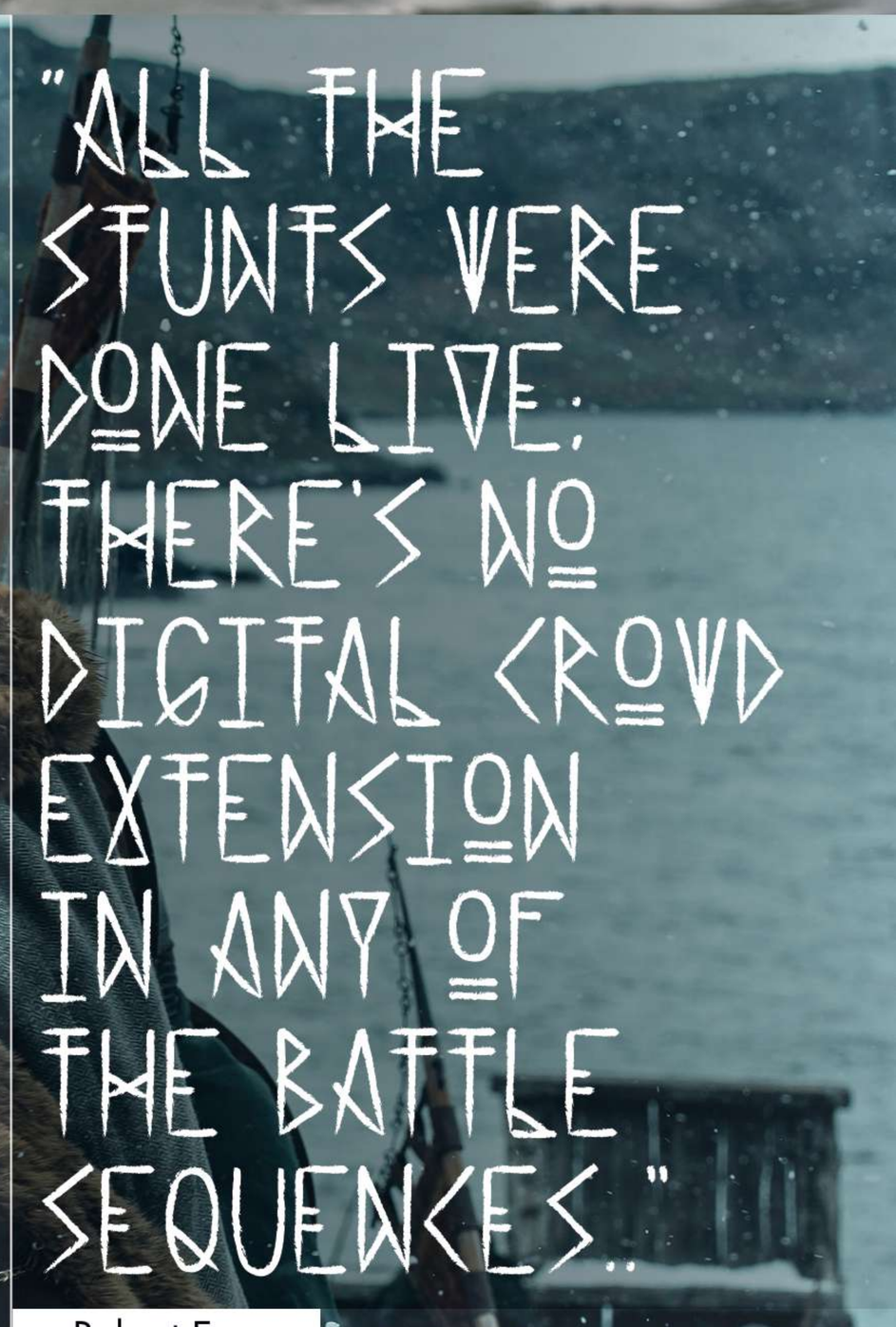
You know, it came close again, but *Nosferatu*, for whatever reason, seems to be something that eludes me. But I've put so much time and effort into it, and it's something Anya and I really want to do, so hopefully this doesn't become another Guillermo del Toro's *Frankenstein* that just never sees fruition.

I GUESS AN OBVIOUS QUESTION IS, ARE YOU LOOKING AT DAFOE TO PLAY THE TITLE ROLE, CONSIDERING HE PLAYED MAX SCHRECK IN *SHADOW OF THE VAMPIRE*?

Well, I will say, and I've said this before: I'm not going to do Max Schreck again. This is definitely *Nosferatu*, it's definitely not Bram Stoker's *Dracula* — whatever that means — but Orlok needs to be rejuvenated, because so much of the brilliance of the Murnau film is Max Schreck, so he needs to be sacred to that movie, you know? 💀

DIRECTOR ROGERT EGGERS LEADS HIS CREW INTO BATTLE — AND INTO THE WATER.

GO OFF, KING (AURVANDIL, PLAYED BY ETHAN HAWKE).



"ALL THE STUNTS WERE DONE LIVE; THERE'S NO DIGITAL CROWD EXTENSION IN ANY OF THE BATTLE SEQUENCES."

- Robert Eggers

Ti West takes a sexy young cast halfway around the world for a cinematic collision of LUST and VIOLENCE!

IN COLOR

THE X-PHILES

BY HEATHER WIXSON

THIS ARTICLE CONTAINS SPOILERS

ADULTS ONLY

It's hard to believe that it's been almost six years since his last film was released (and eight years since his last horror movie, *The Sacrament*, hit theaters), but Ti West has returned to the world of genre storytelling in grand fashion with *X*, his twisted cinematic tribute to the power of independent filmmaking - and that is xxx-citing news all around. For his latest, West collaborated with powerhouse indie studio A24 to transport viewers back to the year 1979 as a ragtag group of adult film performers set out to make an arthouse skin flick in the hopes of finding fame and fortune.

PHOTOS COURTESY A24 / CHRISTOPHER MOSS

After the crew sets up their shoot at a rental property located on an isolated Texas farm, things take a surprisingly grisly turn when the elderly owners' sinister motivations are revealed, resulting in a generational clash between the two groups that leaves a trail of brutalized, bloody bodies in its wake. *X* was also written by West, and stars Mia Goth, Brittany Snow, Scott Mescudi (Kid Cudi), Jenna Ortega and Martin Henderson.

While he's never been one to repeat himself, *X* offered West the opportunity to venture into new territory, as the film represents his very first time at the helm of a slasher. But beyond getting to scratch a few of his creative itches in that genre, West also saw the project as a way to celebrate what he loves about the craft of moviemaking - and it gave him the opportunity to finally team up with the creatives at A24.

"*X* is my love letter to indie cinema and was my reason for coming off the bench and wanting to make a horror film again," West explains. "I was just happily moving along in TV, having a great time, thinking about all different kinds of stuff, and getting to try out all different things. Working in television is a very pleasant job; I quite enjoy it and I hope to go back to doing it because it's really fun. But I had this idea for a movie and I just wasn't sure if anyone else would want to make it with me."

Though reluctant to fully explain the loaded generational themes at the heart of *X*, West says "I would put it this way: getting older is scary. I'm 41. I'm not as young as I used to be, and sometimes that's a bummer. There are things people do when they're young that old people don't really do. There's this assumption that everybody's fine with that... and maybe they're not, you know? And I thought, 'There's a movie about that. I wonder what it is. How does that fit into a horror movie?' Not getting what you want seems to weigh on people pretty heavily. And that's an interesting way to frame a villain, I suppose. And then, absurdity followed."

Finding a home for such absurdity was the easy part. "A24 and I had always threatened to make a movie together, but we just never did it. When I had this idea for *X*, I thought, 'Well, if they want to do it, I'll do it. If they don't want to do it, then I won't.' I don't think I would have made this movie otherwise."

West adds, "*X* is a movie that was about filmmaking and a love letter to the wackiness that is the filmmaking experience. A24 completely understood what I was trying to do with the film from a craft standpoint, and *X* is a very craft-forward movie. There is a high concept to *X*, but it is also easily sellable because of all the sex and the violence and all these other things."

While both have their legions of fans, historically both horror and pornography have generally been viewed as outlier entertainment, so bringing them together in *X* made perfect sense for West, who set out to create a slasher unlike anything fans have experienced before. "Growing up, it always felt like horror movies were treated like they were one step above porn, and that's not the case anymore. Horror movies have become incredibly mainstream and commercial, and they have proven that they can be these humongous corporate successes for studios. But when I was younger, they

"*X* IS A SLASHER MOVIE, SO WE COULDN'T BE SOFT."

- Ti West

were always considered a bit taboo. The horror section in the video store was off in its own corner. It was separated from the rest of the movies.

"So, it felt like horror was always seen as something low-brow, and what I want to hopefully do is to take these things that have been perceived as low-brow and do something that feels high-brow with it," West continues. "I know that may sound pretentious, but I wanted to show that there's something more to both of these types of entertainment than how they had been perceived in the past."

However, he adds, "I had never made a slasher before, but when I think of all the slasher movies that I grew up liking and the ones that inspired me, you see heads getting ripped off and all these crazy kills. So if we were going to do it, we were really going to do it. That was my feeling on the matter. *X* is a slasher movie, so we couldn't be soft."

For many fans, it came as a huge surprise when the film's first trailer dropped, as production on the collaboration between West and A24 had flown mostly under the radar. But according to West, that was on purpose, as he wanted to take fans by surprise for his return to feature filmmaking. "Surprising fans was always the goal. It just feels like everyone, myself included, knows everything about movies before they come out. And I was like, 'Why do we even need to tell anyone that we're making it? Why don't we just go make it and then we'll tell everybody when it's done, and it comes out?'"

Though secrecy is anathema to folks like, say, horror journalists, West feels the gambit paid off. "We were able to keep it pretty quiet for a long time, too. I didn't even really want to announce it when we first cast the film. We did go ahead and do that, but I just felt like the less that people know about *X*, the better it was going to play for audiences. Especially because it seems like there are a lot of people out there who think they know what this movie is, but it's probably not what they think it is at all."

One of the ways they were able to keep *X* largely off the radars of fans everywhere was due to shooting the film in New Zealand during the pandemic, thousands of miles away from the watchful eye of Hollywood.

According to West, "We were going to delay the movie because of COVID-19, since *X* is not a movie that you can make with a lot of distancing protocols. Close contact was very much a part of this film. So, we were going to have to push the movie a year and A24 didn't want to do that. I just happened to joke that we'd have to go to the other hemisphere or something like that, and A24 said, 'Well, okay, let's explore that.' I figured we could look in Australia or New Zealand, but the odds of us finding anything that looks like that part of America is very unlikely. But then, we did. Once we found the exterior of the house and this land that it's on, it was exactly what we were looking for, and we knew that we could build the rest around it."

West concedes that "had there not been COVID-19, *X* probably would have been shot in Texas or Louisiana or somewhere like that. But how we benefited from shooting in New Zealand is that we were able to shoot in places that I think look very much like the south of Texas, but aren't places you've seen before in movies. So, there was something good about that, as though being out there in this unknown location played into the themes of this story."

(THIS PAGE AND FACING)
HERE'S WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU UNDERESTIMATE THE OLDS.

PHOTOS COURTESY A24 / CHRISTOPHER MOSS

With *X*, West knew he needed to find performers who would be completely onboard with not only the provocative material, but his ambitious vision for the film, as well. To find them, West invited potential cast members to explain why they wanted to be a part of *X* in the first place, instead of him trying to sell them on the project.

"We sent the script out and I knew that a lot of people just were going to be like, 'Not a chance in hell' when they read the story, but I wanted to see who didn't say that," West explains. "The first question I asked every single person was, 'Why the hell do you want to be in this movie?' And their answers were very telling. It's a doozy of a movie to go make and I just wanted to make sure that everybody wanted to be in this movie for the right reasons.

"And this cast just got it right from the jump. There are a lot of really talented people who I quite liked and would love to work with who did a great job auditioning for this and had great talks with but they may not have seen this story the way I did. For example, there's Martin Henderson's aspiring porn producer character, Wayne. A lot of people who read for that part saw him as a slicked-back hair, gold chain-wearing guy who was a bit creepy and sleazy. To me, Wayne was more like an entrepreneur, a football coach type of guy. And Martin got that from the moment I spoke to him. He just knew exactly who Wayne was."

The same goes for horror's 2022 It girl, Jenna Ortega (*Scream*, *Wednesday*), whose sound recordist character starts off quietly judging the proceedings (earning her the moniker "Church Mouse"), to being intrigued

MAXINE (MIA GOTH) HAS A SECRET; WAYNE (MARTIN HENDERSON) HAS OCULAR TRAUMA.

and swayed by them, to … well, to having much bigger things to worry about. West sings the actress' praises. "Jenna completely understood the character and was excited to play someone who the audience had assumptions about only to realize that maybe they may have misjudged her the whole time. She also loves horror movies and was super excited to get killed in a very gruesome way."

While the entire cast in *X* puts in top-notch work, the film ends up being a showcase for Mia Goth, who is tasked with taking on two very different characters: Maxine, the porn ingenue, and Pearl, the elderly murderess raging against a world that has judged her no longer viable.

West rhapsodizes about Goth's twofer in the film, saying, "I knew that it was going to be very hard to take on these two roles, but after I met with Mia, I believed she could do it. I felt like the fact that the same person plays our villain and our hero in *X* just made everything feel thematically denser, I suppose. That just seemed so appealing to me. And Mia understood the duality and the parallels of these two characters and was excited to explore the contrasts between them. I needed someone that was just going to take a big swing at this, and she proved just how talented she is with both of these performances."

The dual role, which might fly right past casual viewers, is essential to the film's central themes.

"I wanted to treat Pearl a little bit like a monster in a monster movie. That's why she's a bit obscure in the beginning; if you were making a Frankenstein or Dracula movie, you wouldn't come out of the gate showing the audience everything. You hold back

"THERE ARE A LOT OF PEOPLE OUT THERE WHO THINK THEY KNOW WHAT THIS MOVIE IS, BUT IT'S PROBABLY NOT WHAT THEY THINK IT IS AT ALL."

- Ti West

THIS IS MY SLASHER GAS STATION SCENE; THERE ARE MANY LIKE IT BUT THIS ONE IS MINE. DIRECTOR TI WEST WALKS GOTH AND HENDERSON THROUGH THEIR PRE-PORN SHOOT SHOPPING RUN.

PHOTOS COURTESY A24 / CHRISTOPHER MOSS

a little bit. Being that it's a movie about young people, being very carefree, coming up against old people who are, let's say, the opposite of that, the idea was to treat Pearl a little bit like the way that she is seen by them, or as she sees herself. And to have that villain character not be a standard villain, and to give that some humanity, is what the movie hangs on. And Mia nailed it."

Goth indeed nailed it, with the help of a prosthetic endeavor best described as *daunting*. "It was four or five hours of makeup every day for Mia whenever she was playing Pearl," West reveals. "Acting underneath all of that makeup is very difficult and very time-consuming, and when you take that with having to have the same person being in a scene together with themselves while wearing all that makeup, that's a very difficult thing to pull off." West asserts the effort was worth it. "As far as I'm concerned, horror movies need a lot of practical effects, so we just went full bore. Jason Docherty, Sarah Rubano and everyone at Weta Workshop went so far above and beyond what was expected of them to make this all work. To work with a shop with such enthusiasm, I was extremely fortunate."

Even though he's been working as director since the early 2000s, West still feels like he has a lot of room to explore and grow as a creative force in the industry. And while *X* is very much his way of honoring a bygone era of filmmaking, he has his sights set squarely on the future, and says he has no plans on taking another reprieve from the world of horror anytime soon either.

"Before making *X*, I had done 17 episodes of television in the last five years or so, and that allowed me to spend a lot of time on set. But when you're making movies, it's a funny thing because if you write and direct movies, you don't get to do it very often. Even if you're prolific at it, you're only doing it once a year at the most. So, making movies can be a difficult thing to get better at. It's just something that you have to learn as you go because you can't go out and practice all that much."

He concludes, "I think the biggest takeaway that I have from making *X* is that I pushed myself pretty hard on this movie in a lot of ways to see if I could achieve a number of ambitious things that I set out to achieve. And I think for the most part, as much as one could, I did just that. I created a lot of challenges for myself when I set out to make this movie and now that it's done, I'm quite happy that I did because I think it's changed me as a filmmaker. It also encouraged me to continue to raise the bar for myself going forward, too. *X* was my way of making something for everyone else out there who also loves horror and loves the movie-making process as much as I do, and I hope this weird little story clicks with them like it did with me." 💀

JUST THINK: THIS IS HOW *X* STARTS. SHERIFF DENTLER (JAMES GAYLYN) IS NOT AMUSED.

PHOTO COURTESY OF A24

Mommy issues go next-level in Iris Shim's new thriller.

By Matt Black

In some ways, *Umma* is a movie with a very traditional horror setup. A mother and daughter, living alone on a remote farm, have their tranquil existence upended by the arrival of a stranger bearing an ominous gift: Grandma's ashes. Supernatural occurrences ensue. It's a ghost story, yes, but it could also be viewed as an intimate chamber drama. At its heart, the film is about three generations of women (one of whom happens to be dead) stuck in a house together, tormenting each other, and pulling at threads of long buried secrets until the open wounds of the past can finally be healed.

PHOTO BY SAEED ADYANI / COURTESY OF SONY PICTURES ENTERTAINMENT

AMANDA (SANDRA OH) AND HER DAUGHTER CHRIS (FIVEL STEWART) ARE PULLED INTO A GENERATIONAL NIGHTMARE.

The title of the film is the Korean word for "mom," so it's no surprise that maternal bonds are the film's central preoccupation. "I think for most people, it's the most important relationship that you have," says writer/director Iris Shim. "Whether that relationship is very loving, very fraught, or non-existent, it becomes so significant to who you are."

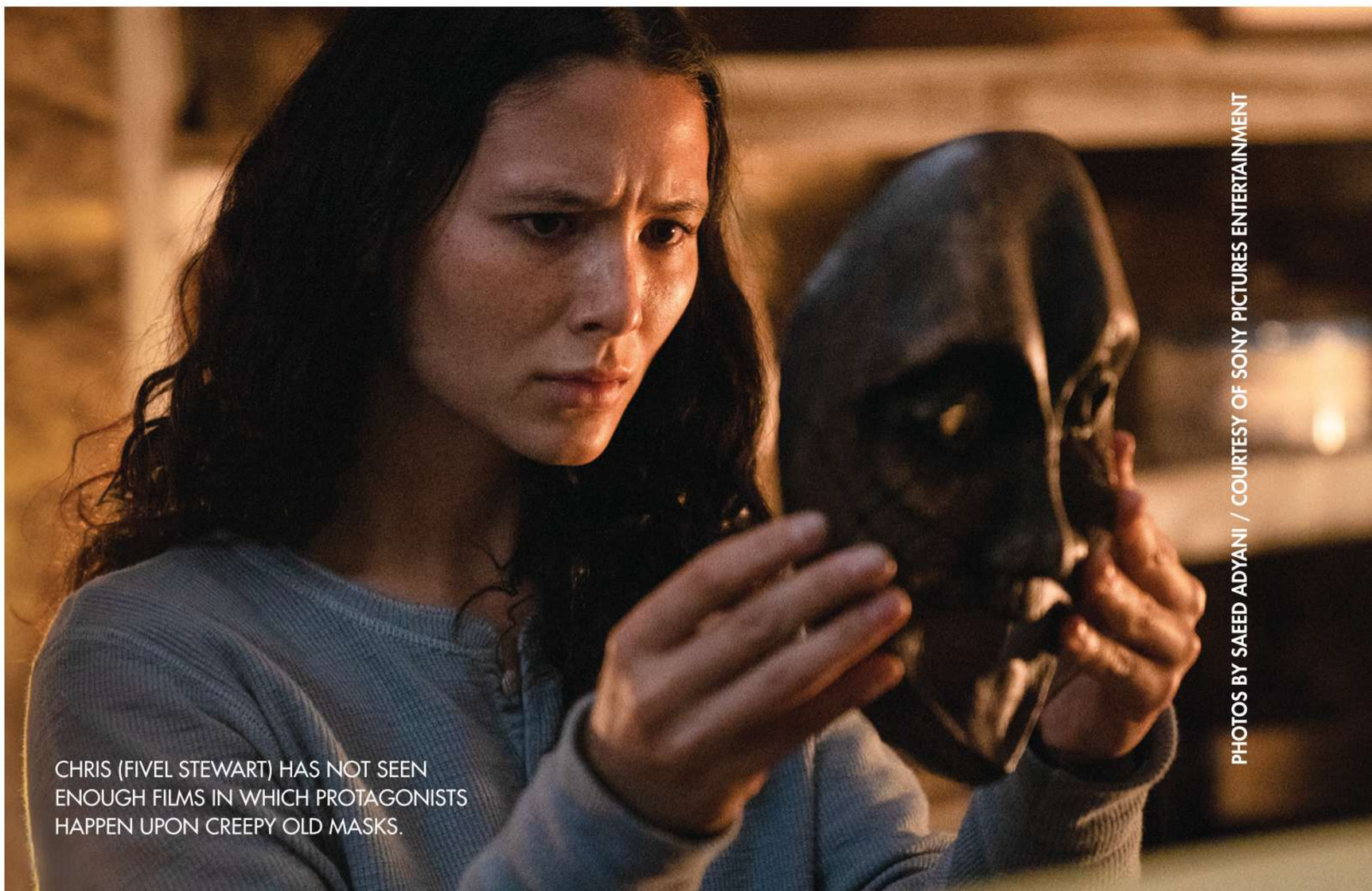
In fact, each of those relational configurations manifest themselves at various times via various characters in the film. A nonexistent relationship comes roaring back, a loving relationship is revealed to be quite fraught, and a fraught relationship is finally healed. Themes get refracted through the generations – from grandmother to mother to daughter – as shifting dynamics demonstrate the thin line between generosity and resentment, love and codependency, protection and smothering.

"There are so many mommy horror films where the mother is just evil," says producer Zainab Azizi. "What I love about this is it's not just the cliché evil mom. It's about breaking the cycle of generational trauma." The Umma the title refers to is the grandmother (Meewha Lee), but the gravitational center of the film – the mother it all revolves around – is Amanda (Sandra Oh). After escaping the clutches of her abusive mother, Amanda weaves an elaborate cocoon around her own daughter, Chris (Fivel Stewart), ostensibly to protect her. It's only with the unwelcome return of Umma that Amanda begins to realize what she's inflicted on her daughter in an attempt to bury the past.

"Amanda tries to completely excise the mother figure in her life," says Shim. "And clearly it's not working. It's something that she needs to confront head on. And she can only do that as a mother herself, by truly understanding what that side of the relationship feels like. So, in a way, her daughter helps Amanda complete her own arc as a daughter herself. I thought about that a lot in the writing and development process, you know – grappling with my own identity as a daughter."

There's no doubt that this is a uniquely personal kind of horror film, but it's not exactly autobiographical. "I have a great relationship with my mom," Shim says, "And so sometimes I feel bad that I made this movie." She laughs, but she also concedes that some things about the film were inspired by her own experiences. "When I started writing a contained horror movie, it didn't occur to me to write one with Korean characters, with their own specific Korean-American conflicts and identity, because I just didn't think that it would ever get made. But eventually I was encouraged by my partner to just write the movie that I wanted to see. It sort of freed me up to focus on characters that really reflected – whether literally or metaphorically – some of the inner conflicts that I experienced as a kid."

It turned out that this cultural specificity is part of what attracted producers Sam Raimi and Zainab Azizi to the project. Azizi, president of Raimi Productions and a first generation Afghan-American, felt an especially personal connection to the



CHRIS (FIVEL STEWART) HAS NOT SEEN ENOUGH FILMS IN WHICH PROTAGONISTS HAPPEN UPON CREEPY OLD MASKS.

PHOTOS BY SAEED ADYANI / COURTESY OF SONY PICTURES ENTERTAINMENT

material. "Ever since I was a little girl, I loved horror films," says Azizi. "I just wished more people looked like me on the screen. So reading this script about first generation women, I just related to it so much, and I wished it was a film I had watched as a kid."

Azizi wasn't the only team member attracted to the material for this reason. When it came to casting, Shim really had just one actor on her wish list for Amanda: Sandra Oh. She wrote the film with Oh in mind, but was convinced it would be impossible to get her. "I was doubtful that she would even engage with this kind of project, meaning a horror movie. You know, it's just not something that we've seen her do before. What I didn't realize at the time was how consciously she was focused on specifically integrating Korean-American elements into her characters. So it was just kismet, I guess, or extreme luck on our part that she was looking for something like this."

This unity of purpose on the part of the creative team allowed Shim to dig even deeper into the ideas about identity and assimilation that inspired the project. "For me, placing these characters in a farm setting – in a very Americana kind of backdrop – was a metaphor for my own experience. There were definitely times when I was younger that I just wished I wasn't different, that I blended in more." In the film, this sense of blending into the surroundings is disturbed by the arrival of a suitcase previously owned by the grandmother. Contained therein are Umma's ashes, but also several of her most treasured belongings, including a hanbok (a traditional Korean garment) and a tal (a ceremonial Korean mask). These culturally specific objects make it difficult for Amanda to continue to block out her history, but they also become associated with Umma's ghostly presence.

Shim felt conflicted about associating these items with the film's villain. She didn't want it to seem like the scares stemmed from a sense of otherness. But ultimately that was the point. "I wanted the characters' journeys to reflect my own: feeling like these items were foreign and frightening because I didn't understand what they were, even though they came from my own culture." It eventually became clear to Shim that it was right for the characters to approach these Korean objects with a sense of "fear and mystery at first, but through the course of the movie, they learn to embrace these things and understand the meaning behind them."

The movie is full of just these kinds of recognitions. Like any good drama, the characters in *Umma* all have secrets. More than that, they have secrets buried so deep that they've obscured the truth from themselves. The horror in *Umma* fuels these perceptions and, by the end, Chris sees Amanda in a new light. Amanda understands things about Umma she never knew before. It's not simply an exorcism that puts an end to the haunting, but a look inward on the part of all the characters.

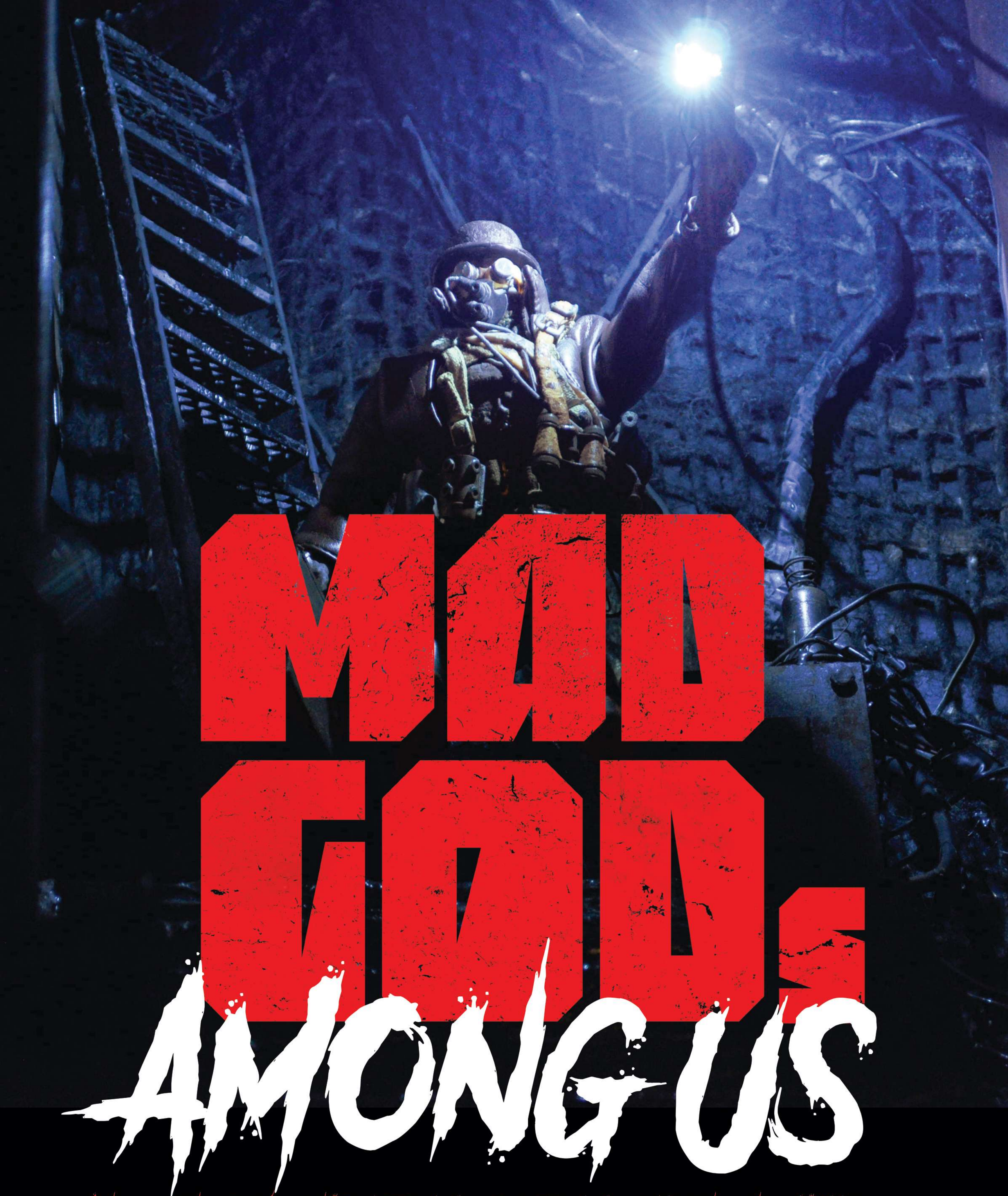
Shim, speaking of her experience working with Oh, explains it like this: "Sometimes it's too painful to understand the truth. I think, in a way, we were both trying to understand our parents' trauma. But in an indirect way, through our art." It's in this way that *Umma* really terrorizes an audience. The jolt of a good jump scare fades, but by mining the tension we all feel – within our families, within our cultures – *Umma* manages to truly get under our skin. 💀

OH AND DIRECTOR IRIS SHIM BLOCK OUT A SCENE TOGETHER.

"I have a great relationship with my mom, and so sometimes I feel bad that I made this movie."

– Iris Shim

SHE AIN'T HEAVY, SHE'S MY *UMMA*.



M.T.A.

KILLS AMONG US

AN OOZING DIVE INTO A FRAME-BY-FRAME WAKING NIGHTMARE, 30 YEARS IN THE MAKING.

BY BRANDON WAINERDI

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SHUDDER

DESCENT INTO MADNESS

There's a moment about a third of the way through *Mad God* where the curtains are literally pulled back. It reveals a silhouetted crowd observing a gruesome surgery, which is playing out onscreen like a Chinese shadow play. Cloaked in those shadows, you can glimpse the back of the wispy hair and long beard of Oscar-winner Phil Tippett, the director, writer, and producer, watching his movie that has been 30 years in the making.

Telling the story of an underground world and the creatures who inhabit it, Tippett's *Mad God* is a horrific tone poem, with a basic enough plot (to start): an unnamed "Assassin" is sent below the depths of this world in order to infiltrate enemy lines with his bombs. Standing between him and his goal are a full army of stop-motion monsters and enemies. And it only gets stranger and more horrific from there.

Tippett, of course, needs no introduction to genre fans. The heir apparent to stop-frame legends Ray Harryhausen (*The 7th Voyage of Sinbad*) and Willis H. O'Brien (*King Kong*), Tippett began his creative journey at a young age, thanks to the sharp eye of his artist father, who owned a large collection of art books. Showing him pages of Hieronymus Bosch and Pieter Bruegel paintings, it set off a spark in the mind's eye of young Tippett. "Ever since then," he recounts, "I wanted to *make* a Hieronymus Bosch movie. And now, with *Mad God*, I think I've somehow managed to do it."

After being hired by George Lucas in 1975 to animate the chess scene in the original *Star Wars*, Tippett quickly became the go-to person in Hollywood when it came time to breathe life into movie monsters. He designed and animated the eponymous predators in Joe Dante's *Piranha* before returning to the fledgling Industrial Light & Magic to co-pioneer a new animation technique called "go-motion," which brought the AT-ATs and Tauntauns to shuddering life in *The Empire Strikes Back*.

Following his illustrious run at ILM, Tippett ventured off on his own in 1984, founding Tippett Studio in his garage. From there, he continued to innovate within the stop-motion industry (including working on *Robocop*'s iconic ED-209 with Paul Verhoeven), eventually helping to bridge the gap between practical and digital.

As he puts it: "I was always a monster guy. I didn't do anything begrudgingly because I was able to creatively do what I wanted. And I *loved* it."

It was during this period in the late '80s that he first began to work on *Mad God* as a side passion project. He imagined a dark and primordial world, one that could serve as a blank slate for his nightmares to roam freely upon. He filled notebooks with sketches and storyboards, and began to build puppets and environments for the movie. However, after shooting just a few minutes' worth of footage, he abandoned it all due to work obligations. "Everything blew up. The scope and scale of what I wanted to do was just too big," Tippett says.

"I WANTED TO MAKE A HIERONYMUS BOSCH MOVIE. AND NOW, WITH MAD GOD, I THINK I'VE SOMEHOW MANAGED TO DO IT."

- PHIL TIPPETT

The CG revolution was burgeoning. *Jurassic Park* (where he is, of course, famously credited as "Dinosaur Supervisor") had just washed over Hollywood, and the need for practical creatures was dwindling.

But Tippett Studio adapted… or, rather, *evolved*.

After twenty years leading Tippett Studio through this evolution (which included work on movies like Verhoeven's *Starship Troopers*), *Mad God* was rediscovered, this time by curious employees who happened to glance over while Tippett was archiving some of his original 35mm footage. Initially thinking it was an old Czechoslovakian movie from the '40s, the clips were nevertheless intriguing to his staff, and suddenly, Tippett found himself with an enthusiastic crew that wanted to help finish this story. As he says, "These people believe in you. They have no reason to fucking believe in you, but it was like going on an adventure."

And so, while Tippett Studio had spent 20 years diving headfirst into computer-generated effects, it still had some of the best stop-motion artists working under its roof. As production on *Mad God* restarted, Tippett also found eager student volunteers around the Bay Area, which soon led to more than 60 artists working on the project over the course of filming.

"During the week, I could plan what they would do. For instance, there was one huge task that would have shut me down if I had to do it all myself: making mountains of dead army men. Even with the help, that alone took almost three years to complete, with four to six people working on their weekends."

Kickstarter, still in its relative infancy, was used to finance the first twelve-minute "Part I" of the *Mad God*

"WHAT WAS IMPORTANT TO ME WITH MAD GOD WAS NOT TO MAKE A MOVIE, BUT TO MAKE AN EXPERIENCE."

- PHIL TIPPETT

story in 2013. Over time, Parts II and III were added to the mix, and now the full movie has expanded from those initial crowdfunded parts, into an 80-minute epic.

The actual story of Mad God is a twisting, wide-reaching tale. When we meet "The Assassin," he descends into a heavily guarded underground world full of tortured souls and decrepit bunkers. And, of course, The Assassin – as well as nearly all the elements that he encounters on his journey (including "Shitmen," mutants, and witches) – are stop-motion puppets, imbued with an incredible weight, stepping and writhing into this nightmarish world.

The narrative constantly shifts throughout the film, switching protagonists and points-of-view often. It does not have a normal three-act narrative structure. But, as Tippett says: "What was important to me with *Mad God* was not to make a movie, but to make an *experience*."

But the process of building these creatures seems to be the same as it has always been, still wholly unique and totally Tippett. It is interesting to search for those common threads of *RoboCop*'s ED-209 or *The Empire Strikes Back*'s Tauntaun when certain characters appear on the screen. And, indeed, if you look at maquettes produced from Tippett's *Return of the Jedi* Creature Shop (like the bulbous, grotesque visages of proto-Jabba, or even the Dark Overlords in *Howard the Duck*), they all could fit right into this reality.

From Kickstarter to film festivals, it took another eight years to get this full vision into the world. Tippett remembers: "I was very trepidatious about the whole thing, because I would send it out to filmmaking friends, and they would all tell me it's fantastic... but that it's not for everybody. When the first two festivals rejected it, I got extremely depressed. But then it was accepted into Locarno Film Festival, because we started to put it into all the genre and horror film festivals, and it began to find its audience."

This found audience is comprised of the people who have been inspired by Tippett's work for over 40 decades. The movie is a singular vision, every frame lovingly filled with a jarring world of tortured souls and globular monsters. It is an intimate look inside the mind of someone who brought to life so many of the most iconic moments in cinema.

And now, *Mad God* will be available June 16th on Shudder, and a fresh new audience can be immersed into something wholly unique.

"If you build a better mousetrap, the world will beat a path to your door. You're going to have to do something different. The last thing this could ever be was *sentimental*, which would have been the worst thing I could possibly do, because it's a phony and bogus emotion. But if I did something that I felt was honest, then I hoped people would pick up on it."

Indeed, this honesty is a rare feat in horror, and makes *Mad God* a complete triumph. All hail the master. 💀

THIS PAGE AND FACING:
SCENES OF *MAD*-NESS.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SHUDDER

ANATOMY OF A SCENE

PHIL TIPPETT ON BRINGING ONE MEMORABLE SCENE FROM MAD GOD TO LIFE.

BY BRANDON WAINERDI

The monster maker, ***Phil Tippett****, took time with* FANGORIA *to dissect the making of a scene in his movie,* Mad God. *A seamless combination of stop-motion, live actors, practical effects, and a set crammed full of insane knickknacks, we go through the process of crafting one of the stand-out scenes of the movie: the operating table.*

To paint the picture: this seven-minute scene begins with the camera panning down an uncountable number of hospital rooms. After finally settling on a bandaged patient, the victim is put through an incredible amount of torture by a surgeon and his team, who eventually retrieve a crying something, which was lurking deep within.

How did you make the live-action elements (like the nurses and the doctors) feel like a natural part of this stop-motion world?

It was actually the first scene we filmed after a twenty-year hiatus.

Twenty years earlier, I had done a motion control shot of what I call "the eternal hospital," which dissolved into a shot of the guy who was The Assassin, but now is the victim.

We then built a duplicate live-action set and started blocking shots… and it looked like *crap*. It was too in-your-face and ugly. So, we spent the next three weeks coming up with choreography, the basis of which I stole from Japanese horror films, which would shoot things in reverse and step print, or shoot at high speed.

I had the actors (who are not professional actors, just people who work at my studio) rehearse the movements over and over again, until their muscle memory intrinsically understood what they were doing. Then I would have them do a take, which they did backwards, and as slow as they possibly could, in order to *break* everything. There was no possible way that they could have their center of gravity, or remember what they knew intuitively. We would shoot that at high speed, then we would speed it all forward, at the equivalent of 24 frames a second. That's how we achieved that look.

As they rip the guts out of the Assassin, I was surprised by the content of the innards: coins, books, and pages of magazines.

There are all these riches, as the surgeons are "mining," but the riches are *irrelevant*. There were coins and false teeth and necklaces, as well as literature and books. Actually, one of the last things that gets thrown down onto the ground is Lee Iacocca's book on the economy [*laughs*].

They are mining the culture, full of riches and information, but it's irrelevant to this surgeon. He was looking for something *else*.

And that "something else" is, well, *very Eraserhead*… a screaming, squirming tentacle of a baby.

Oh yeah, I ripped off David Lynch. I mean, that's the thing, you rip off as many people as you possibly can. It was always, what can we do next? Let's draw from Kubrick or from *Night of the Living Dead*.

The discordant music is a particularly effective tool in this scene, merging the clock ticking with Dan Wool's score.

I was so lucky to get Dan, as our composer, and Richard Beggs as our sound designer. We had all worked together with Alex Cox (director of *Repo Man* and star of *Mad God*).

I wanted the score to be a partner with the picture. The first thing I did was to show Dan an 8mm sketch of *Mad God* that I had done on tape, which was a collage of all kinds of stuff. It was just noisy, with my kids screaming and me scrolling through the AM radio. But it hit a chord with Dan, who was totally into ambient music and had been doing experimental stuff with theater and dance companies for years. It was a marriage made in heaven.

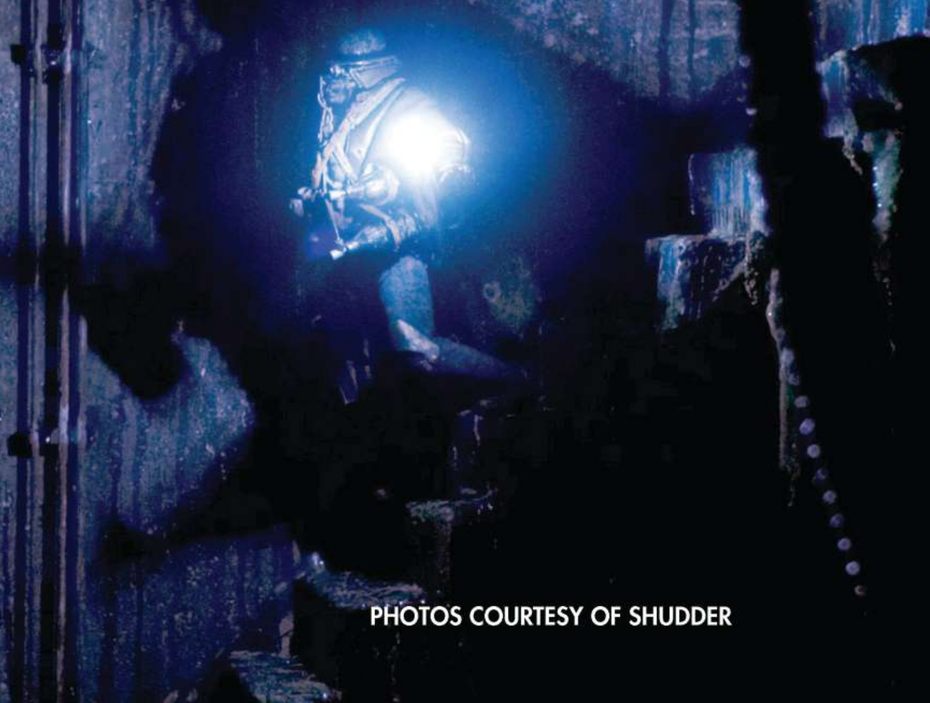
And I think sound is more than half the experience of *Mad God*. It makes it a completely different movie. Truly incredible.

You've mentioned before that a lot of the elements in this movie are a collage of found items that you've picked up over the years. How do you know if something is interesting enough to be in the shot?

Well, for instance, the clock in this scene is actually Marie Antoinette's clock.

Back in the day, my partner, Jules, was in the editorial department on *Amadeus*. We would go out to dinner with Milos Forman (director, also of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*). Since I was a young filmmaker, I asked him for advice, and he gave me the best advice I have ever heard which is, "If you want to take a good shit, you have to eat well."

I couldn't make *Mad God* in the late '80s because I was not ready at that point in my life. But taking those twenty years to *study, study, study* made all the difference in the world. 💀



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SHUDDER

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Clay Among the Pixels: The Practical Magic of

JURASSIC WORLD DOMINION

By Abbie Bernstein

Jurassic World Dominion chronicles what happens following the events of 2018's *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom*, when a horde of genetically-modified dinosaurs are freed from a laboratory. This is good news for the dinosaurs, but perhaps less so for the west coast of the United States, where the creatures proceed to wreak havoc.

Dominion's creature effects supervisor, John Nolan, would like it known that he's a lifelong FANGORIA fan. "I read *Cinefex* and FANGORIA all the time. I used to get my magnifying glass out and see the glue sticks on the shelves in the pictures, to try and get an understanding of how people built stuff. So, it's a real honor to be asked for an interview."

Dominion is the third entry in the *Jurassic World* trilogy, which follows the initial *Jurassic Park* trilogy (including 1997's *Lost World: Jurassic Park* and 2001's *Jurassic Park III*), based on Michael Crichton's novel. The original 1993 *Jurassic Park* was directed by Steven Spielberg, who today serves as an executive producer on all things *Jurassic*. The film's Oscar-winning special and visual dinosaur effects by the late Stan Winston and his team (including Dennis Muren, Phil Tippett, and Michael Lantieri) remain iconic.

Nolan and his London-based John Nolan Studios are new to the *Jurassic* world, although Nolan himself has dinosaur-making experience dating back to the 1999 British miniseries *Walking with Dinosaurs*, when he worked for Jez Harris. *Dominion* chief sculptor David Darby's credits include *Prometheus* and *1917*. Both men separately get on the phone from England to talk about their *Dominion* work.

Dominion's line producer/associate producer Tim Wellspring had previously worked with both Nolan and Darby on Netflix's series *The Dark Crystal: Age of Resistance*, in collaboration with Jim Henson's Creature Shop. "We'd just wrapped two years on that," Nolan recalls. "It [had] about three hundred puppets; we had a hundred and eighty-three-person crew."

Nolan adds that he and Wellspring had a great time together on *Dark Crystal*. But when Wellspring first contacted Nolan about *Dominion*, the producer could not divulge the film's title. As the result of a false rumor, Nolan guessed the project was *Gremlins 3*. "Tim says, 'I've got this film. You're going to go crazy, but it's right up your street, after doing these puppets with us.' So, I thought, 'This is *Gremlins 3*!' And I was running around the house…" Nolan sings the *Gremlins* theme music, laughing.

Then Wellspring called Nolan back and revealed the project was *Jurassic Park Dominion*. "I was like, 'You're joking.' That was mind-boggling. I met with the producers and Colin Trevorrow at his office."

PHOTOS: JOHN WILSON/UNIVERSAL PICTURES AND AMBLIN ENTERTAINMENT

Director Trevorrow – who also helmed the first *Jurassic World* and co-wrote the screenplays of all three films in the trilogy – kept the interview simple, Nolan continues. "He said, 'So, do you like dinosaurs?' 'Yes. I love dinosaurs.' 'Do you want to make some?' 'Yes.' 'Okay, you've got the job.' And then we went through the huge list of dinosaurs."

Emphasizing his respect for his *Jurassic* predecessors, Nolan says, "Obviously, Stan Winston is an absolute legend, and it's an honor to have been approached to build the dinosaurs for this one. Everyone of my generation that got into what we do, it's because of Stan Winston and his studio." Nolan likewise expresses appreciation of Neal Scanlan, the creature and special makeup effects supervisor on *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom*.

While Scanlan isn't back, there are a number of *Jurassic* veterans on *Dominion*. These include paleontologist consultant Steve Brusatte. "He's great," Nolan enthuses. "Everything went through him. And of course, a lot of the sculptures went through Steven Spielberg and Colin. We've even got sculptors and some of the crew from Neal Scanlan's team."

Nolan was warmly received by the cast. "The first thing Laura Dern said to me was, 'Welcome to the family,' which was one of the nicest things to be on the receiving end of."

Dominion production visual effects supervisor David Vickery at ILM had also been on *Fallen Kingdom*. "All his inspirations come from the same films as myself and Colin," says Nolan. "He's ready to do anything he can do to help us in visual effects. I loved that. Because when I first got into [practical effects], back in the *Harry Potter* days, people said, 'Ah, why are you getting into it? We're a dying breed, visual effects is going to take over.' Well, *Jurassic* is a perfect example of how digital and practical complement each other."

Darby admits to being one of those who formerly believed practical effects were on the way out. "I remember going to see the first [*Jurassic Park*], and thinking that was the death of animatronics, because the CG was so good, but then, working on this one, there was a boatload of animatronics. It was quite a turnaround."

Sculpting both practically and digitally, Darby notes that different dinosaurs call for different techniques. Of the first four the team worked on, "One of them was the compy [short for Compsognathus], the little lizardy-type things. We kept those digital. I reworked the old ILM [digital] model to make it more user-friendly for animatronics. The other three were the Nasutoceratops, the Dimorphodon, and the Dilophosaurus. We tackled those ones traditionally, sculpting them in plasteline, which is like an oil-based clay."

The sculpture team was on *Dominion* for over a year, through preproduction and into production. Darby says, "We originally had about eight sculptors. On the Giganotosaurus, we upped it to about ten. One person would be the lead sculptor on each dinosaur, and then they would be joined towards the end, which would be the detailing, by either one or two other people." Different sculptors were rotated for each part of each dinosaur, because if one sculptor does all of the neck, and someone else does all of the head, "It starts to look like a patchwork quilt. We like people to move from the head to the foot. As long as people have a good understanding of anatomy, they can do pretty much anything."

While visual effects and ILM remain crucial to any *Jurassic* film, Nolan observes that *Dominion* has "the biggest practical approach from all of the films. We built thirty-eight dinosaurs, fourteen species, I think. Some were tiny, like the compies. And then the Giga, which has a head the size of a car." They are built full-scale, although some parts are either off-camera, or augmented by CGI. "To go from one scale to the other is a challenge in itself, but it's exciting. We had to work out how you perform something on a

THE DILOPHOSAURUS AND ITS GLAM SQUAD.

"We built thirty-eight dinosaurs, fourteen species, I think. Some were tiny, like the compies. And then the Giga, which has a head the size of a car."
- John Nolan

CREATURE EFFECTS SUPERVISOR JOHN NOLAN AND FRIENDS.

PHOTOS: JOHN WILSON/UNIVERSAL PICTURES AND AMBLIN ENTERTAINMENT

small scale, but then how you can control something on a big scale. It was something Colin really wanted to explore."

Darby says his sculptures are primarily "real-world scale." Sadly, the production files relating to the original size of the Dilophosaurus, first seen in the first *Jurassic Park*, were nowhere to be found. "So, we were looking through magazines, books, and old video references to try to find the exact scale. In the end, we printed out three different-sized scales on foam board, using the photocopier and the printer. We presented those to Colin Trevorrow and [production designer] Kevin Jenkins and David Vickery, to see what size would work for them."

Reza Karim, foam department head at John Nolan Studio, was the lead Dilophosaurus sculptor.

It was important that the dinosaur looks the same as it did in the first film, Darby adds. "You don't want to update it, you want to pay homage to it, and how it was in the original, because fans love it. Colin was very particular about, 'It should look like the original'." On the other hand, "We did have fun with some of the new ones we did. If Steve, the paleontologist, approved of it, then Colin loved it."

One new dinosaur is the Dimetrodon, which, Darby relates, "was probably my favorite dinosaur that we sculpted. It's your classic dinosaur with the big sail on its back. We found pictures of the skeleton and the skull. [The sail is] an extension of the spinal cord. The teeth were pretty much like shark's teeth, in the shape, and because it also had serrations on the edges of the sides of the teeth."

The creature effects team hugely enjoyed seeing the actors respond to the larger full-scale dinosaurs, Nolan reports. "When we switched the Giga on for the first time, the cast just screamed. To be able to build stuff and for it to interact with the cast and to see their reactions was incredible."

All of the creature designs start with reference and research. In the era of Google, there is much to be found on the internet. And, Nolan points out, "With *Jurassic*, we've got the luxury of looking at the previous films. Unfortunately, [much of] the archives, the images of previous work, all the molds, don't exist anymore, so bringing back certain dinosaurs that were in previous films, we had to do so much research, freeze-framing the original films. We would then get into the sculpting, either in more traditional wet clay, or in 3D [digital] sculpting. We would look at the muscles, and [skin] textures."

A different department is responsible for creating the animatronics that make the practical dinosaurs move. Nolan refers to the animatronic equipment as "the robot. With the muscles, once we've got the skin, we have to create something that fits between the robot and the skin, which is what we call the core and the muscle shapes.

"The core is like a skeleton that we put over the robot, and that holds the skin onto the [muscle] shapes. When it moves, you can't have fiberglass [visible in] the hard forms. You have to have separate padding. The fabrication department builds muscles that are attached to elastic, so that when the puppet moves around, rather than things popping and getting crushed by the robot that's inside it, you have these lovely muscles that move around underneath the skin and hold the skin out into the correct shapes."

Nolan adds that this is much how CGI creatures are designed: a 3D digital skeleton is built, muscles are laid over the structure, then skin is added, textured, and colored.

However, Darby says, for sculpts used to design practical dinosaurs, "We do it differently. I use the [3D computer sculpting] program Z-Brush, so I would start sculpting big shapes, the head,

PHOTOS: JOHN WILSON/UNIVERSAL PICTURES AND AMBLIN ENTERTAINMENT

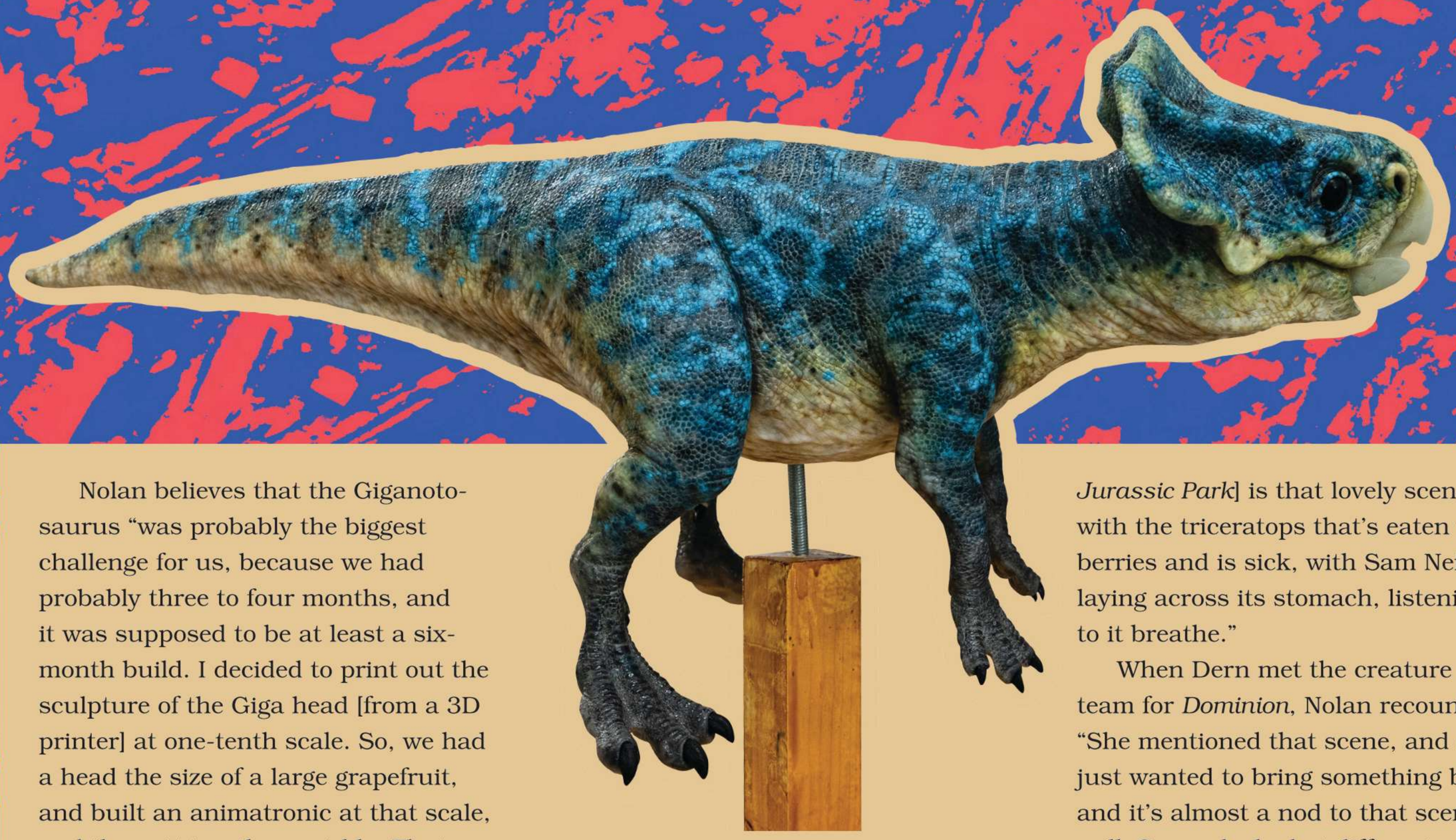
"JURASSIC IS A PERFECT EXAMPLE OF HOW DIGITAL AND PRACTICAL COMPLEMENT EACH OTHER." - JOHN NOLAN

IT TAKES A VILLAGE: THE EFFECTS TEAM HARD AT WORK ON CREATING A TACTILE *WORLD*.

the neck, the body, tail, legs, and work that way. Because all we're worried about is what it looks like on the outside, so we can get it printed, because [after that], the animatronics take over, and they rig the cable on the inside, all the mechanical work."

There is a huge amount of labor involved in the sculptures, Darby observes. "Every dinosaur was hand-sculpted, using sculpting tools, mainly." Alas, there is no tool for making individual dinosaur scales. "I wish there was, because it would have made our job a lot quicker. You can get really lost in sculpting all that stuff. When you look back, and you see how many scales you've sculpted, you think, 'Wow, okay, that's a lot of work'," he laughs.

In other circumstances, Nolan says, miniatures might have been used. "If a dinosaur is too big, then we might build it on a smaller scale, shoot it as if it was larger, and then [composite] into a shot." But on *Dominion*, "Everything was live animatronics, or hand-puppeteered, and it was all full-scale. Obviously we crossed over with visual effects, because of the way that we work nowadays, and because of technology, we actually sculpt in 3D now, and then we 3D-print the forms that we made."



Nolan believes that the Giganotosaurus "was probably the biggest challenge for us, because we had probably three to four months, and it was supposed to be at least a six-month build. I decided to print out the sculpture of the Giga head [from a 3D printer] at one-tenth scale. So, we had a head the size of a large grapefruit, and built an animatronic at that scale, and threw it together quickly. That was something that we performed in front of the director and the producers and all the other departments, and said, 'This is what we propose for the movement of the Giga. We just need to work out how to do it on a larger scale'."

After that, Nolan's department began collaborating with the visual effects department on the whole of the Giga, "because we knew that we were only going to build the neck and the head practically, and they would extend it in CGI. All the interactive stuff with the film set would be us. We could get the head to smash through a window practically, and snap at the cast."

The on-set practical special effects department also became involved, Nolan continues. "We gave Paul Corbould and his amazing special effects team all the rigging points, which related back to David Vickery and his visual effects team. All the pivot points and all the anatomy of the creature had to match perfectly for each [practical and digital version]. Once we got those pivot points from a rigged [CG] animated version of the Giga, we put that into an animatronic, gave the full animatronic and our drawings to special effects. They did a fantastic job of creating this huge hydraulic-controlled neck mechanism, and we stuck an animatronic head on top of it."

The animatronics are operated by the same type of radio controls used in remotely piloting drones. For dinosaur heads, these operate elements like eye blinks and lip snarls.

Dominion's practical effects extend even to when a dinosaur is eating a human, though care was taken not to mangle any actors or stunt people. "With the Giga," Nolan recalls, "we had rubber teeth, and there were safety precautions. If the robot was switched on, it's a huge rig, so that thing could crush you. You've got a head the size of a car with a jaw that's controlled with huge hydraulic rams. So, we had [members of] a crew who had 'dead man' buttons. If they let go of the button, the power for the robot would shut down, and it would stop instantly. We worked out the best way to do it with the cast and the stunt team. No one was ever in danger."

Another *Jurassic* tradition is making dinosaurs that can express emotion without becoming caricatures. "When we sculpt dinosaurs," Darby says, "we have the mouth open, the eyes slightly closed, almost like they're squinting – we keep the brows up if they have brows. Otherwise, it's harder for the animatronics to get expressions out of the character."

"That's the challenge of our job," Nolan observes, "to create a dinosaur that has that emotion. You see it in all the previous films. We have this wonderful scene with Laura Dern where there's a baby Nasutoceratops. The last time that she was looking after a practical dinosaur [in the first *Jurassic Park*] is that lovely scene with the triceratops that's eaten the berries and is sick, with Sam Neill laying across its stomach, listening to it breathe."

When Dern met the creature effects team for *Dominion*, Nolan recounts, "She mentioned that scene, and she just wanted to bring something back, and it's almost a nod to that scene as well. So, we looked at different ways of building the animatronic. Our job is to try and make something that's very engineered, made out of heavy metal, but that looks as organic as possible, with pivot points and curves and fluid, natural movements. We tried to create as much emotion within these dinosaurs as possible."

This had to be subtle, though, as real reptiles are known for keeping their feelings to themselves. "But," Nolan says, "I think a perfect example is the pupil dilation in the eyes, which we did with in-camera effects. That really helps, and [so do] sounds, and even the saliva. And just small breathing – they have fast air bladders, tubes, underneath the skin, and that can create emotion. We're not doing things like dinosaur smiles, but there are definitely ways of getting emotion across."

What's most unique about *Jurassic World Dominion* for Darby is that "Stan Winston had set a design. We wanted something that lived up to that quality. And I think we have achieved it."

In conclusion, Nolan says of practical creature effects, "We might be able to create a dinosaur that can thrash its head around and smash through a wall, but if it's got to run from A to B, you know that you're going to be relying on visual effects to take over. So, *Jurassic World Dominion* is the perfect blend of all the three disciplines: special effects, creature effects, and visual effects." 💀

WELCOME TO...

JURASSIC MERCH

PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS, 65 MILLION YEARS IN THE MAKING

BY JASON KAUZLARICH

Before the original novel by Michael Crichton was even finished, Steven Spielberg and Universal Studios had *already* bought the movie rights for what ended up becoming one of the biggest blockbusters in history. *Jurassic Park* has gone on to spawn five sequels, three theme park rides, as well as an animated series for Netflix. And, of course, as soon as that original movie was unleashed onto the audiences, *Jurassic Park* merchandise exploded onto toy store shelves and into McDonald's Happy Meals.

FANGORIA is taking a look at some of those items released in 1993, as well as some of the newer merchandise that has kept the amber-filled legacy alive.

McDonald's collectible *Jurassic Park* cups. 1992

McDonald's employee *Jurassic Park* cap. 1993

***Jurassic News* promotional poster brochures. 1993**

***Jurassic Park* Raptor Eggs candy. 1992**

JURASSIC PARK
Original Motion Picture Soundtrack
Music Composed and Conducted by John Williams
Album Produced by John Williams
SIDE C
9. Dennis Steals The Embryo
10. A Tree For My Bed
11. High-Wire Stunts
12. Remembering Petticoat Lane
13. Jurassic Park Gate
SIDE D
14. Eye To Eye
15. T-Rex Rescue & Finale
16. End Credits

Mondo - *Jurassic Park* Original Motion Picture Soundtrack 2XLP (Dilophosaurus variant). 2015

Assorted Kenner *Jurassic Park* toys. 1993

Sega Genesis cartridges for *Jurassic Park* and *Jurassic Park: Rampage Edition*. 1993/1994

Complete set of Topps *Jurassic Park* trading cards. 1993

Complete set of Skycaps *Jurassic Park* pogs. 1993

Jurassic Park Spitter (Dilophosaurus) Mask and claws. 1992

Promotional Burger King watches for *The Lost World*. 1997

Jurassic Park Original Hero Overhead Anorak. 2021

LEGEND

- Jason Kauzlarich's Collection
- Outlaw Moon Games & Toys Austin, TX

PHOTO BY ALYSSA VIDALES

WHAT'S INSIDE THE EGG HATCHING

BY MICHAEL GINGOLD

It was four years ago that Finnish director Hanna Bergholm and producer Mika Ritalahti introduced a project called *Birds of a Feather* to an audience at the Fantasia International Film Festival's Frontières Co-Production Market in Montreal. Via striking production art and tantalizing story details, the duo gave prospective backers, other industry folk and journalists a taste of what proved to be one of the most intriguing movies pitched during the event. That promise has now paid off: Retitled *Hatching*, the film premiered to strong reviews early this year at Sundance, and sees theatrical/VOD release April 29 from IFC Midnight.

Scripted by Ilja Rautsi from a story by Rautsi and Bergholm, *Hatching* stars first-time actress Siiri Solalinna as Tinja, a 12-year-old gymnast under intense pressure from her mother (Sophia Heikkilä) to be the best. Mom, in fact, is obsessed with perfection in all aspects of her and her family's suburban existence, which she celebrates in her "Lovely Everyday Life" blog. Then the household receives an unwelcome visitor: a crow that causes havoc in the living room before being subdued by Tinja, and then cruelly killed by Mother. After the bird is disposed of outside, Tinja discovers that it has left behind an egg that she hides in her bedroom, nurturing it to an unnatural size. When it hatches, the creature that emerges becomes the girl's surrogate child — one she keeps hidden as it begins to channel her feelings, and threatens to act on her more unpleasant impulses.

The basic premise and its development are essentially the same as those described back during Frontières, though Bergholm notes one particular change in emphasis since then. "It was a long writing process, because we started to develop the script in 2014," she says. "We were still working on it while we were at Fantasia, trying to find the financing, and we focused even more on the relationship between Tinja and her mother. That was something we did even during the filming process, fine-tuning it even more to really concentrate on that relationship. In the very early script versions, there was more about the father [Jani Volanen] and the little brother [Oiva Ollila], but then we changed that. From the very beginning, though, it really was a story about a mother and daughter, and it developed even further that way. We realized that the film worked better when we didn't concentrate so much on the male characters."

GROWING PAINS: SIIRI SOLALINNA IN *HATCHING*.

PHOTOS BY ANDREJS STROKINS / COURTESY IFC FILMS

The idea was first hatched by Rautsi, who brought Bergholm the concept of a boy who hatches his evil doppelganger out of an egg. The director suggested a change in the young protagonist's gender, and also contributed "my own memories of having these imaginary monsters in my wardrobe when I was a child, and being scared of them and trying to keep them under control, but at the same time becoming kind of fond of them."

That Frontières presentation did the trick of bringing top international sales company Wild Bunch on board, for what would eventually become a co-production between Finland, Norway, Sweden, Latvia and Belgium. Bergholm notes that *Hatching* secured the biggest budget that any female director has had in Finland, and that she had complete creative freedom while shooting it. "I was really lucky, because Mika is the kind of producer who respects the artist, so he let me direct this film the way I wanted. Our financiers and distributors all watched versions of the film during editing and gave us comments, but I was always allowed to make my own decisions. They were actually good comments, and I was thankful for them, because they really helped us develop the story."

To find the right young performer for Tinja, the production auditioned around 1,200 girls from all over Finland via self-tapes, and discovered Solalinna, who not only had never previously acted, but had no experience with either her maiden vehicle's genre or her character's pursuit. "I had never seen a horror film before I made this," Solalinna says, "and I'm not a gymnast. I'm actually a synchronized skater, so I worked with a gymnastics trainer in Helsinki."

On screen, with the help of a stunt double for the most difficult moments, Solalinna completely convinces as an expert on the parallel bars and balance beam — even if Tinja isn't truly there of her own volition. The choice of sport was partially inspired by Rautsi's childhood background as a gymnast ("Though he has good memories of it!" Bergholm laughs) and also because "we wanted Tinja to have a hobby that her mother is pushing her in," the director says. "Gymnastics was perfect because it's so competitive,

TINJA (SOLALINNA) AND MOTHER (SOPHIA HEIKKILÄ) ADJUST TO A NEW ADDITION TO THE FAMILY.

and her mother wants her to compete and win. Also, it's very important there that Tinja's body language and everything she does physically is perfect, and having the perfect body and doing everything just right is important to the movie's themes."

"I thought what was interesting about the story was how Tinja tries to please her mother and fulfill her every want, in order to get her mom to love her," adds Solalinna. Cast as the stage — or gymnasium — mother who runs Tinja's life was Heikkilä, who had a number of theater and TV credits but also made her film debut in *Hatching*. She too was unfamiliar with genre cinema, having been scared off it by a viewing of *It* at a friend's house at age 9, though she was intrigued by *Hatching*'s approach.

"I read the script and was like, 'This is so strange, what is this?'," Heikkilä remembers. "But I was very interested in the idea that you could tell a story like this with such depth through horror. I told Hanna straight away when I came to the audition, 'I'm sorry, but I'm really not used to horror!,' but I was very impressed by the way the script mixed that genre with drama. It was completely new to me.

"I also remember Hanna telling me, 'It's a very juicy character,' and Mother definitely was, and I realized this was going to be tough. I have three daughters myself, and I had to find sides to the role that I could relate to — and unfortunately, I did find those. Playing this awful person and saying horrible things to Tinja was difficult for me, and sometimes I had to say, 'Sorry, Siiri,' because she was just 12 years old and hadn't done any acting before, and it felt really bad to be such a terrible mother to her."

The third star of *Hatching* is the birdlike being that emerges from the egg and becomes a secret resident of the house, and comes to threaten the lives of the people in it. "I wanted the creature to be an animatronic puppet, so that it would have a real physical presence," Bergholm explains. "And I knew we needed the best possible people to make it, because it is such an important character. So I actually Googled 'Best animatronic designer in the world,' and Google told me that the best animatronic designer in the world was Gustav Hoegen, who had done the *Star Wars* movies and *Jurassic World* and *Prometheus*; I discovered that, oh my God, this was the guy who had made all my favorite characters. So I contacted him and basically said, 'Hello, I'm from Finland and I have a film, low-budget but with a good story,' and he got interested in coming on board. We created the design of the puppet together, and then Gustav's crew built it, and it was amazing."

This freaky, fleshy, feathery creation hews pretty close in appearance to the beaked beast in the early *Birds of a Feather* illustrations, and is just part of the effects show *Hatching* offers. There's plenty of gore and prosthetics as well, and supervising the special makeup was Conor O'Sullivan, who has an equally impressive résumé. "I had admired Conor's work in *Saving Private Ryan* and *The Dark Knight* [both of which won him Oscar nominations] and *Game of Thrones* and so on and so on," Bergholm says. "So I contacted him and explained the story, and he saw some of the creature designs we had done, and got fascinated by the challenge of doing all these effects, and he came on board, as well."

"I loved watching Conor at work," Heikkilä says. "It was amazing, I was so starstruck, just seeing how he solved problems that came up: 'No, this blood is too runny,' and he would come back with some other blood, or 'This is too slimy…' Those technical bits were really, really interesting to me."

It was Solalinna, though, who had to get up close and personal with the monster makers' handiwork. "At first, the most difficult part of the movie was acting with the puppet," she recalls. "It was weird, and there were all the puppeteers around it, so it wasn't as easy as acting with a person. But then I got used to it, and I just had to imagine that it was real. It also felt a bit funny to act with the [oversized] egg, but by that point, I had acted with the puppet, so it was OK. When I was doing those scenes, I was just thinking about what had happened to Tinja, and what she was thinking and feeling in that moment."

Just as crucial as the effects to the movie's overall mood are the precise cinematography by Jarkko T.

This freaky, fleshy, feathery creation hews pretty close in appearance to the beaked beast in the early *Birds of a Feather* illustrations, and is just part of the effects show *Hatching* offers.

EARLY *HATCHING* CONCEPT ART.

PHOTOS BY ANDREJS STROKINS / COURTESY IFC FILMS

Laine and production design by Päivi Kettunen, which combine to create Mother's world as seen through Tinja's eyes. "I wanted the design of the house to have all the elements that are generally thought to be lovely, like pastel colors and little roses," Bergholm explains, "and everything is so tidy and well-organized and perfect that it feels kind of dead. Päivi came up with the idea of, what if all the flowers in the house are dried, so they look dead? And we created the backstory that the father takes care of the roses outside, and when he gives them to the mother, she just kills them!

"And when Jarkko and I talked about the lighting, we felt that since the mother is controlling everything and doesn't want any secrets in the family, there should be no dark shadows, no place anyone can hide, so all the lights are very soft. Even the night scenes use quite soft light, and the only real shadows are in the scenes with the monster. To my mind, the creepiest thing is actually this lovely world the mother has created, and not necessarily the creature."

The potent themes Bergholm and Rautsi explore in *Hatching* will be carried over into their next collaboration, the director reveals. "Ilja and I are co-writing a new film that's also a kind of horror/drama about motherhood. It's fairly close to *Hatching* in the sense that it's about a young couple who have their first child, and when it is born, suddenly the mother feels that there's something wrong with it and she can't really connect with it, and that is because there is something inhuman about this child. It takes place during the first year in the child's life, and it talks about the difficult emotions of motherhood, and the painful side of motherly love."

In the meantime, all involved with *Hatching* hope that audiences worldwide will embrace their own odd "child," and that it hatches a new fright-film trend in Finland. "Since we shot this, there have been two more Finnish horror movies made, so maybe this is our new genre. Nordic noir is kind of last-century," Heikkilä laughs. "I hope that people who are like me, who do not have much experience with horror movies or who don't necessarily like them, will see ours anyway, and maybe women my age will be able to relate to it. I also want to say that I sincerely hope the language won't be a barrier for anyone, because I believe people will realize this film has a universal theme." 💀

PHOTOS BY ANDREJS STROKINS / COURTESY IFC FILMS

HATCHING HAS MORE THAN ONE MONSTER.

THE DOOM BOOM

BY SIMON ABRAMS

You either know about the Ramsay brothers and the so-called "Doom Boom" of Indian horror movies from the '80s and early '90s, or you don't. There are several reasons for this general lack of international cult film worship, but the biggest is simply a matter of scarcity: there are almost no legally available versions of Doom Boom titles that feature English subtitles.

That wasn't always the case.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BOUM PRODUCTIONS

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From 2006 to 2009, intrepid film scholar and cult movie advocate Pete Tombs worked with DVD label Mondo Macabro to release a handful of fully subtitled Southeast Asian horror movies. This included the delightfully cheesy Pakistani vampire movie *The Living Corpse* (1967) and six Hindi-language titles officially credited to Shyam and Tulsi Ramsay. Before writing this article, Indian movie distributor Eros Entertainment also briefly released a couple dozen Indian horror movies — not only Doom Boom titles but also Tollywood (Telugu language) and Kollywood (Tamil) horror movies from the '70s and '80s. Most of the older titles are unavailable now. As of this writing, nobody at Eros has answered my requests for more information.

Today, Doom Boom movies like *Purana Mandir* (1984) and *Veerana* (1988) look like transmissions from another planet: re-animated ghosts and corpses stalk swimsuit-clad women and their singing paramours. The most familiar parts of these movies resemble (and are directly influenced by) American horror movies like *The Exorcist*, *The Omen*, *The Evil Dead*, and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* — but only parts. Doom Boom horror movies are mostly concerned with romantic angst, shirtless he-man punching, and cross-generational miscommunication. Eventually, shaman-like "Tantrics" are called to vanquish hulking vampire and zombie-types with splotchy monster makeup. Then everybody gets married and respects their elders.

Hindi-language horror movies at the time were as popular as they were novel, and Doom Boom movies specifically were very much a product of Bollywood's kitchen sink masala tradition. Filmmakers would throw everything at moviegoers, including fart jokes, musical numbers, sexy girls, and yes, bloodthirsty monsters, all in the same family-friendly and ostentatiously moral narrative. But by 1991, the Doom Boom had gone bust, partly because of sudden over-exposure and because the horror genre failed to catch on with more established Bollywood filmmakers.

There are a few reasons why Eros hasn't done much, if anything, to bring back the Doom Boom. As Tombs writes in *Mondo Macabro: Weird and Wonderful Cinema Around the World*, "Indian horror films are tragically uneven. The makeup and special effects are woefully inadequate. Almost all of them resort to the same simple camera tricks of double exposure or winding the film backward. The same bits of stock footage are frequently re-used."

Film scholar Mithuraaj Dhusiya speculates that "Most of [the Ramsay brothers'] business revenue came from the semi-urban and rural sectors, and it earned them enough money to keep consistently producing more films for almost twenty years. Perhaps, this was the reason that these films could never attain respectability through being self-sufficient genre by themselves." Dhusiya also notes that while "most

(THESE PAGES AND FOLLOWING) SCENES FROM A MOVEMENT: THE "DOOM BOOM" OF THE '80S AND '90S.

of the early scholarship on Indian horror revolved primarily around Ramsay horror movies," the Ramsays "were never a part of mainstream Hindi cinema, with their focus primarily on the B-category audience."

Their movies — and the Doom Boom movement with which the Ramsays' films were often associated — are mostly remembered for their limited production values and appeal. Why would Eros export older movies that are not respected among Hindi-speaking movie buffs? Apart from camp aficionados and diehard horror buffs, who wants to watch such roughly-hewn movies?

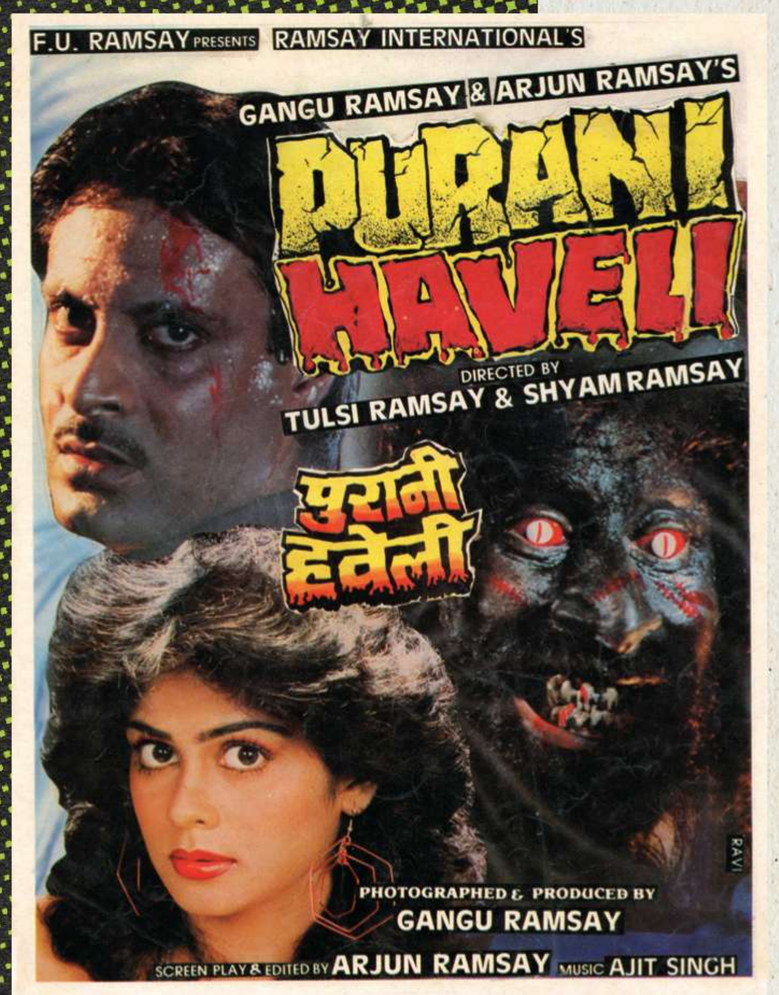
"The problem in many ways lies with the term 'horror' itself," Tombs said on the subject. "In India, the word carries so much baggage. To bring up the subject in film circles is almost the same as announcing that you are a half-wit. It just isn't taken seriously. It conjures up images of bad acting, lumpy-faced monsters, wind machines, and the producer's girlfriend in a bikini. It is the equivalent of the term 'Z movie,' and it carries all the same negative connotations."

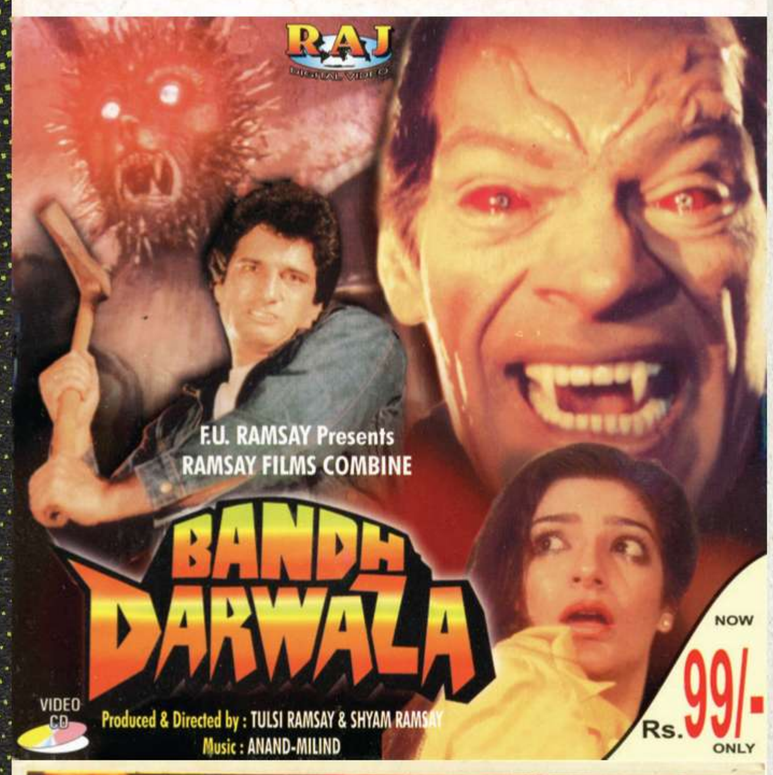
Even Shamya Dasgupta, an Indian film historian and author of *Don't Disturb the Dead*, a compelling and authoritative book on the production of the Ramsay brothers' work, had difficulty convincing them to let him write a serious book about their

DOOM BOOM HORROR MOVIES ARE MOSTLY CONCERNED WITH ROMANTIC ANGST, SHIRTLESS HE-MAN PUNCHING, AND CROSS-GENERATIONAL MISCOMMUNICATION.

movies. Tulsi Ramsay, the Ramsays' business-minded promoter and producer, was particularly skeptical: "For so many years, we didn't even do interviews — we never wanted to do a book either [...] What is my benefit from a book? I need to make money, run my family. What is the logic in doing interviews and being written about? We need publicity for our films — can a book do that?"

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BOUM PRODUCTIONS





He goes on to add, "When we were making films, no one took us seriously. Now... suddenly there is so much interest in our films. Why?"

You won't find many sensible or encouraging answers in the English-language articles about them. Many of my fellow film buffs assume that you already know who they are or have at least made up your mind about their movies. As a result, you get a lot of defensive, heavily qualified writing that's light on basic historical context, like who made these movies, what motivated them, and why did this trend start and stop in such a short amount of time? To appreciate these essays, you must already be a card-carrying member of this particular cult. Recently, American historians and critics like Dasgupta, Dhusiya, Tombs, Grady Hendrix, and Jerry Pinto have written both insightful and accessible articles on the subject. Still, general discussions about these movies' production, impact, and value will remain limited until they are made available to a wider audience.

Towards that end, the Doom Boom arguably starts and stops with the Ramsay brothers, the children of presenter and producer F.U. Ramsay: Arjun, Gangu, Keshu, Kiran, Kumar, Tulsi, and Shyam. The brothers initially specialized in different aspects of filmmaking to formally qualify for membership in India's trade-specialized unions. Gangu and Keshu served as the Ramsays' regular cinematographers while Shyam directed, Kumar scripted (often with Shyam), Kiran recorded sound, and Arjun edited.

The Ramsays' concern with union membership — not to mention their need for approval from strict, post-independence government film censors — immediately sets them apart from most American exploitation filmmakers of the 1960s, most of whom tried to get away with showing and suggesting more than the Ramsays ever could. Even Mohan Bhakri, one of the Ramsays' most prominent and salacious competitors, made relatively tame exploitation movies, like the jubilantly silly genre hybrid *Kabrastan* (1988). Bhakri's films were generally better-advertised thanks to their more expensive and graphic movie posters.

Still, the Ramsays often rolled the dice with the Indian film censors when they submitted their titles to the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC). *Do Gaz Zameen Ke Neeche*, a crude but formative creature feature involving a shambling, zombie-like corpse, was passed without much fuss and received an A certificate (for Adult, the equivalent of an American R rating) from the CBFC in 1972. But the 1975 release of *Andhera*, a convoluted tale of the supernatural involving gangsters and a wraith-like monster with metallic claws, was delayed for a couple of years because of CBFC deliberation, much of which was concerned with a lengthy (but implied) beach-side sex scene. And *Veerana*, the Ramsays' evocative story about a sexy succubus, was held up for eight months before it was released in 1988 with 46 cuts. Omitted material includes an (intentionally comedic) shot of a guy getting kicked in the crotch and of Jasmin Dhunna taking her clothes off before swimming.

The CBFC is unlike the mysterious self-appointed members of the Motion Pictures Association of America in that Indian censors are typically more concerned with violence than sex. This was rarely a problem for the Ramsays, whose more titillating material was still fairly chaste. According to Dasgupta, "the Ramsays [usually] stopped short of actual kissing, forget sex. [...] Just a coming together of lips for a moment or two on occasion." Shyam Ramsay added that "sex sells, and we use sex where necessary. But we never overdo it."

The CBFC also inadvertently helped the Ramsays and their competitors identify just how much suggestive material was permissible... for a while.

Domestic censors got a little tougher following the box office success of movies like 1979's *Jaani Dushman*, in which a vampire-like ghost possesses lovers, disrupts wedding plans, and exacerbates power struggles in a rural dacoit bandit community. They also cracked down on the Ramsays' *Purana Mandir* (1984), which went on to inspire a handful of other Indian horror movies about haunted temples, ancient curses, and possessed singing homewreckers.

By 1984, Bollywood horror movies were subjected to more scrutiny

thanks to changes in leadership at the CBFC. The successors of Chairman K.L. Khandpur (1976 – 1981), most notably Surresh Mathur (1983) and Vikram Singh (1983 – 1989), had to take the Ramsays more seriously once *Purana Mandir* put a dent in the Indian box office. "After *Purana Mandir*, [the Ramsays] mattered," Dasgupta writes. "And once that happened, the scissors came out."

It was like a chain reaction: the Ramsays inspired Mohan Bhakri (*Cheekh*, *Khooni Murdaa*), who in turn directly encouraged fellow Punjabi director Vinod Talwar (*Raat Ke Andhere Mein*, *Khooni Panja*).

With that said, the Ramsays and their imitators all tried to appeal to a broad adult audience by reassuring viewers that these movies were just light-hearted romantic comedies that also happened to feature bug-eyed monsters and jealous demons. From *Jaani Dushman* onward, most Doom Boom films are essentially corny rom-coms with scattered horror elements about young lovers who either voluntarily or reluctantly abscond to the countryside. Movies like *Mangalsutra*, *Hotel*, and *Tahkhana* feature a combination of round-house kicks, rolls in the hay, lecherous fat guys, and musical numbers. You won't get an effective scare-fest, but you will get several helpings of tush-shaking, fat-shaming, and monster-mashing fun.

Many Doom Boom movies blatantly take cues from John Landis' "Thriller" music video, which warns impressionable viewers what that they're about to see is not an endorsement of the occult. Several films like *Veerana*, *Kabrastan* (both from 1988), and *Mahakaal* (1994) feature explicit references to Michael Jackson's dance moves — *Kabrastan*'s goofy graveyard dance party is easily my favorite of the bunch.

The Ramsays' horror movies only improved as they honed their craft: 1990's *Bandh Darwaza* and 1994's *Mahakaal* are some of their most polished and impressive. Unfortunately, the Doom Boom started to lose its hold on audiences between 1990 and 1991. While Bollywood filmmakers sporadically continue to make horror movies today, most English-language movie critics, scholars, and historians only consider the Ramsays' earlier efforts, like proto-*Poltergeist* chiller *Hotel*, to be essential.

Many pundits tend to over-emphasize the Ramsays' competitors, especially post-Doom Boom titles by relative newcomers like Ram Gopal Varma. His film *Raat* (1992) was hailed by Jerry Pinto as a "game-changer," saying it "redefined horror and made it acceptable."

Meanwhile, Mohan Bhakri is often put down by even the most vocal defenders of Bollywood horror. They contend that the quality of his films is inferior to the family's pioneering titles. Exceptions are made for the Ramsays as a whole because they established a trend, but Bhakri's films are often dismissed as amateurish also-rans.

The key to enjoying Doom Boom movies is to watch them with the knowledge that you're not going to be able to suspend your disbelief — at least not for very long. That's not how these movies work, though they still offer genuinely fun monster makeup and infectiously earnest cheesecake shots of girls in bikinis. Their songs are goofy but catchy (at best), and if "Thriller"-style dance numbers and leering sex jokes don't do it for you, maybe you'll enjoy the topless fight scenes with improbable sound effects.

The real reason why Doom Boom isn't well-known outside of India is that it's often spoken about like turf that needs defending instead of a party that needs crashing. A handful of people I've spoken to who have heard of movies like *Mahakaal*, aka: "The Bollywood *Nightmare on Elm Street* remake," only learned about them thanks to the heroic efforts of Pete Tombs and Mondo Macabro. Unfortunately, Tombs was only able to release six Indian titles. Don't you want to see and read more about movies like *Roohani Taqat*, Bhakri's riff on *Pumpkinhead*? Or *Saamri*, one of the only 3-D Indian horror movies?

If horror fans can't see these movies for themselves, they run the risk of missing out on a captivating and intoxicatingly weird strain of genre cinema. Keep the party going, and don't forget to RSVP. 💀

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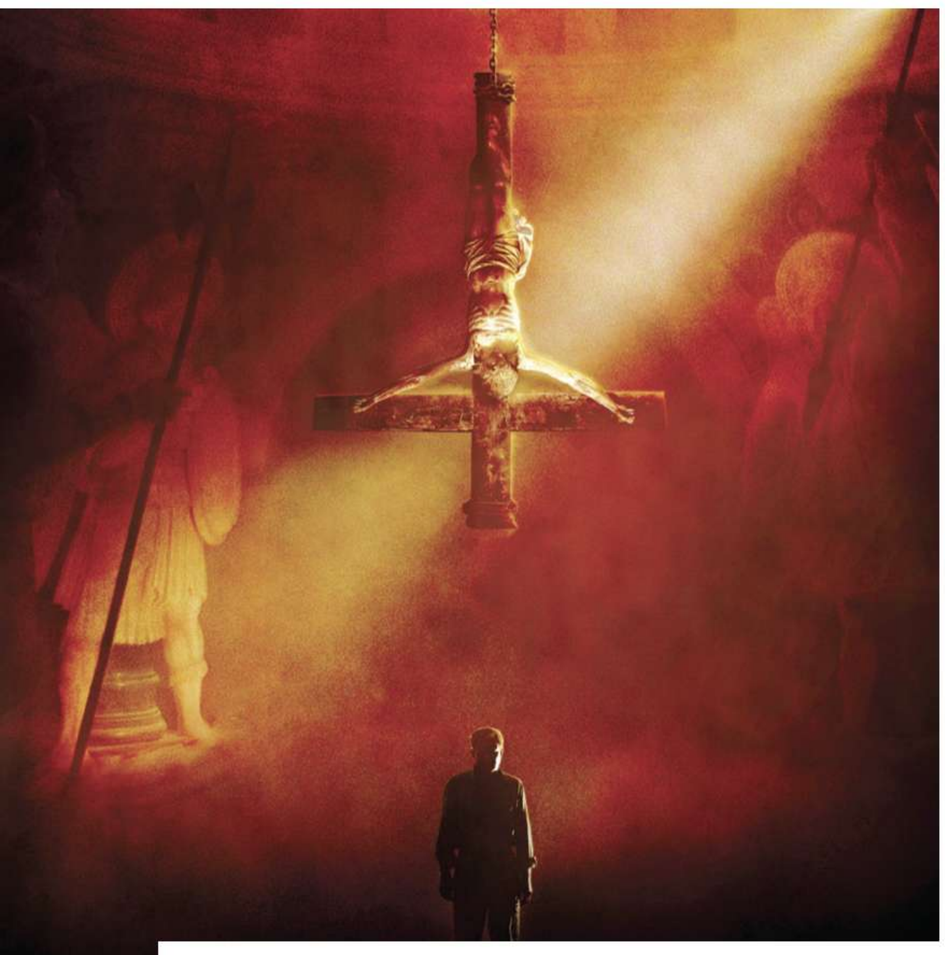
PHOTOS COURTESY OF BOUM PRODUCTIONS

EXORCIST 4x2-1

A Tale of Two Prequels

BY T.J. TRANCHELL / ILLUSTRATION BY TRAVIS KNIGHT

The road to telling the origin story of *The Exorcist*'s Father Merrin was long and winding — and one that eventually split. In 2001, Morgan Creek Productions decided the world needed a prequel to arguably the greatest horror film ever made. What we got were two slightly different versions of the story about the first exorcism performed by the "old priest," neither of which were very good. But in examining the two efforts, a fascinating film history lesson/cautionary tale emerges.



Which came first: *Exorcist: The Beginning* or *Dominion: A Prequel to The Exorcist*? It's a complicated situation that seems to start with screenwriter William Wisher Jr. According to Chris VanderKaay, author of *The Anatomy of Fear: Conversations with Cult Horror and Science Fiction Film Creators*, Wisher was contacted and asked to develop a new story for the *Exorcist* series. He was opposed to the idea, to put it mildly. Specifically, he had this to say: "Not only do I not want to do that, I don't think the world needs another one of those." There was no story there, at least not one that seemed readily apparent. Until Wisher remembered why Father Merrin (played initially by Max von Sydow) was asked to perform Regan MacNeil's exorcism in the first place: he was one of the only living priests at the time who had performed the ritual. There was a backstory to be mined.

After finding the angle, Wisher got to work co-writing the screenplay with the celebrated author Caleb Carr. Eventually, acclaimed filmmaker Paul Schrader (*Taxi Driver*, *Cat People*, *The Last Temptation of Christ*) signed on to direct Wisher and Carr's script, adding an element of prestige to the project. Then, they cast Stellan Skarsgård as the younger version of Merrin. At the time, Skarsgård had appeared in several American movies, including *Good Will Hunting*, *Ronin*, and *Deep Blue Sea*, but he was hardly a household name.

EACH PRODUCTION HAD ITS UNIQUE ADVANTAGES, SOME OF WHICH INCLUDED SHOOTING LOCATIONS.

TAKE A KNEE AND TRY AGAIN:
STELLAN SKARSGÅRD IN *EXORCIST: THE BEGINNING*.

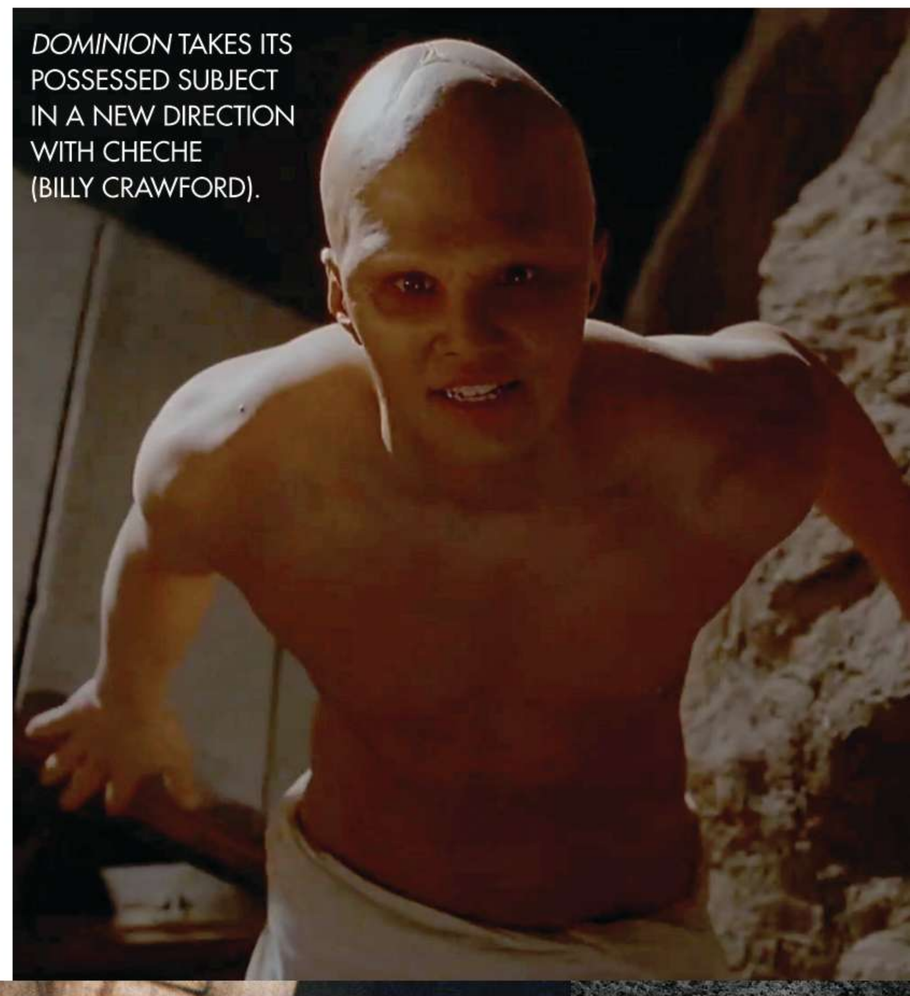
They made Schrader's film as he had envisioned it, but producer and Morgan Creek co-founder James G. Robinson didn't like the filmmaker's final cut. It was deemed unmarketable, and so, before they had even completed post-production, the entire movie was shelved.

Despite the setback, Morgan Creek still had a precious property at its disposal, and it seemed like a waste to just let the project languish in cinematic limbo. They decided to take Wisher and Carr's story and give it a revamp, losing the elements they thought hindered the film and adding in new ones they thought were more characteristic of the genre and, therefore, more likely to terrify audiences.

All of which meant, first and foremost, a new director. In October 2003, they hired Renny Harlin (*A Nightmare on Elm Street 4: The Dream Master*) to direct the studio's second attempt at the *Exorcist* prequel. The rewritten screenplay came from Alexi Hawley, and filming was soon underway. Skarsgård returned along with a few other actors, retained for what might have initially seemed like reshoots but what soon became apparent was a completely different movie.

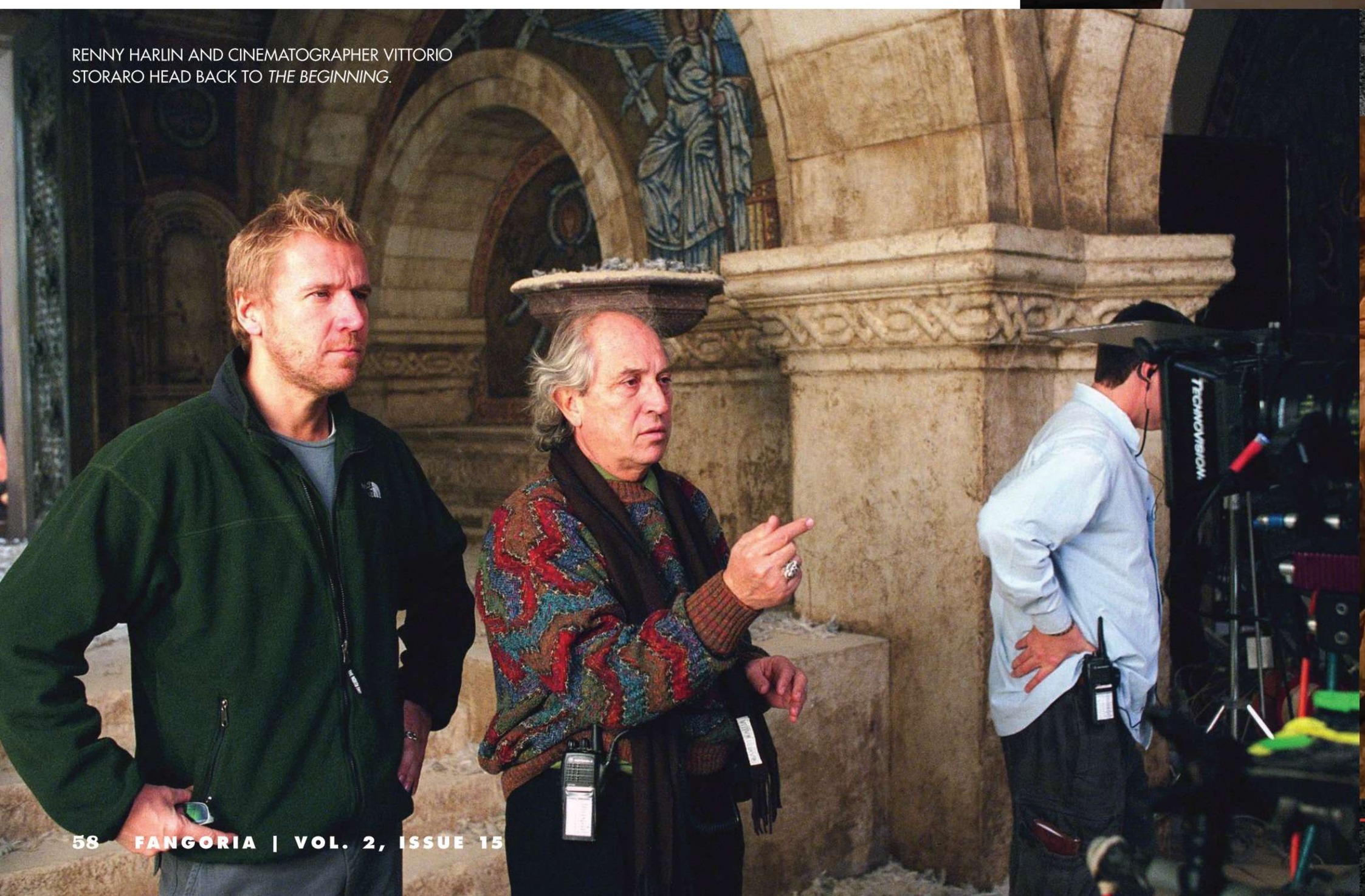
Each production had its unique advantages, some of which included shooting locations. Schrader had the good fortune of filming on location in Morocco, replicating the Kenyan desert, before finishing production in Rome. On the other hand, Harlin only had the Rome studios at his disposal. Watching the Kenya scenes in each of the two movies is like looking at first cousins: you can tell they're related, but that doesn't mean they're close. Meanwhile, the scenes filmed in Rome are even more startling, like cinematic twins. They are so close and similar at points you could hardly blame the viewer for confusing which film they're watching.

WHILE *DOMINION* WAS LEFT UNFINISHED UNTIL *THE BEGINNING* SIMILARLY FLOPPED, SCHRADER'S VISION MIGHT BE THE ONE TO SURVIVE.



DOMINION TAKES ITS POSSESSED SUBJECT IN A NEW DIRECTION WITH CHECHE (BILLY CRAWFORD).

Neither film is completely without merit and, unquestionably, Stellan Skarsgård is the most substantial part of each. In his film commentary, Schrader compared him to his predecessor, Max von Sydow, and not just for their shared Swedish backgrounds. It was the similar way they filled up the screen that captivated Schrader. In his director's commentary, Harlin doesn't say a lot about Skarsgård's performance, but what he does say is



RENNY HARLIN AND CINEMATOGRAPHER VITTORIO STORARO HEAD BACK TO *THE BEGINNING*.

DOMINION (LEF
THE BEGINNING

nearly identical to Schrader's thoughts on his embodiment of Merrin.

Of Skarsgård, Schrader says he has a "John Wayne walk," describing his final scenes in the film as though Merrin were a character in an old Western who had finally found his courage again as he rides off into the sunset, a gunslinger for God. While Harlin doesn't mention John Wayne at all, he says that Father Merrin becomes "a warrior of God, ready to be called again." You can picture it, Father Merrin carrying his six-gun at his side as he lives to fight another day. Merrin's rosary and crucifix are his weapons of choice in both cases.

One of the biggest pitfalls of both interations was the reliance on a white savior narrative trope. While both films are set in the 1940s, primarily in 1949, they were still made in a post-9/11 world. In his version, Schrader describes the British military encampment as a "Western fort," framing it as a positive influence on the area. It's a narrative that's hard to swallow, especially alongside the prevailing history of white dominance over people of color, a profound issue in both films.

W. Scott Poole, scholar and the author of *Wastelands: The Great War and the Origins of Modern Horror*, said of these films that "the prequels make too much of the 'exotic' world of 'primitive religion' [and] that gives it the feel of the genre of 'Americans abroad in a scary place that's so different from us.'" Rather than emphasize the horrific corruption of innocence as with William Peter Blatty's original novel, both *Dominion* and *The Beginning* opt instead for tired and harmful cliches as a means of sensationalism.

At one point in his director's commentary on the film, Harlin goes so far as to call his version a "journey into this heart of darkness," harkening back to Joseph Conrad's novella. Conrad's exploration of colonialism among the African nations was critical in its day, but in hindsight, hardly critical enough, while using the Africans in his story as a kind of canvas for his narrative. Harlin and Schrader's respective approaches accomplished the same thing, sensationalizing and weaponizing Africanness for the sake of eliciting fear and shock. Both films reductively deploy Nazism as a sign of evil, further fueling their superficial exploration of more profound concepts.

While that colonialist subtext may have been lost on the filmmakers — or at least misinterpreted and poorly represented — both Schrader and Harlin seemed invested in the legacy of the material. This prequel saga began 13 years after *The Exorcist III: Legion* in 1990, itself 17 years after William Friedkin's original shocked the world. These films and the TV series all share the near-complete dismissal of the events from 1977's *Exorcist II: The Heretic*. While Merrin's experience in performing exorcisms in Africa

) AVOIDS THE FAMILIAR;
(RIGHT) LEANS IN.

IN *EXORCIST: THE BEGINNING*, A POSSESSED SARAH (IZABELLA SCORUPCO) GOES WITH WHAT WORKS.

MERRIN (SKARSGÅRD) PAYS HIS DUES IN *DOMINION*.

remains, the first sequel tells an entirely different story of the experience than either of the prequels. So, the continuity is destroyed depending on what you consider canon.

The Beginning makes a solid effort to fulfill its goal as a prequel to a landmark film. Harlin was concerned with establishing the details of Merrin's journey, the existence of the demon Pazuzu and its presence in Merrin's life. They find Pazuzu in the unearthed chapel in Kenya; a massive statue buried deep underneath the tomb-like structure. Viewers are meant to immediately recognize the icon as the same depiction Merrin finds in Iraq years later, before being summoned to Georgetown in *The Exorcist*.

Harlin opted to open his movie with a corpse-riddled medieval battlefield, implying the demon's presence as far back as the crusades. Even with less-than-stellar CGI, those opening shots are arguably some of *The Beginning*'s best. Sadly, it's all downhill from there. Dr. Sarah Novak's (Izabella Scorupco) inclusion as an unconvincing love interest for the priest becomes a strange MacGuffin, as Sarah is essentially fridged for the sake of Merrin's restored faith, thereby making *The Exorcist* possible.

In direct contrast to Harlin's efforts, Schrader opted to use images similar to Pazuzu while omitting the exact figure, indicating that he didn't want to include the familiar iconography in a land so far from the place where Merrin found the small icon in 1973. As a result, Schrader's version exists in a strange nexus that is both farther from and closer to the context of the original story. Each director cherry-picked images from the original film to use in different ways, but neither wholly succeeds in evoking the same sense of dread that Friedkin did. The iconic white-faced demon appears in both films, though they're used to varying degrees of success, and neither filmmaker makes use of Mike Oldfield's iconic "Tubular Bells." The bigger sin is that both films still missed the mark when it came to the true terror at the story's heart.

While *Dominion* was left unfinished until *The Beginning* similarly flopped, Schrader's vision might be the one to survive. The story in *Dominion* is more deeply rooted in and connected to the mysteries of faith, whereas *The Beginning* plays out like a low-budget knockoff of a seminal genre classic more concerned with jump scares than evoking lingering and lasting dread. Under Schrader's watch, Skarsgård's performance feels more faithful to what von Sydow brought to Father Merrin, his depth and nuance, and that alone makes it worth watching.

Ultimately, the two films fail for the same reasons that many prequels do: the impact of terror is lost once the mask is removed, the mystery explained. Father Merrin's presence in *The Exorcist* is almost as mysterious as the notion of God himself and the vicious power of Pazuzu. It feels perfunctory here, a declawed approach to terror.

"The truth is that it harms the narrative to give Father Merrin (and Pazuzu) a backstory," Poole says. "The enigmatic opening of *The Exorcist* is supposed to be just that… enigmatic. Moreover, it was meant to move us from where we think evil might lie into the upper-middle-class world of Georgetown." Shifting the source of evil back to a "foreign" land also diverts any responsibility away from the white imperialists at the center of the story's narrative. It's the opposite of what Father Karras (Jason Miller) does at the end of *The Exorcist*. Just because a film is a prequel doesn't mean we can forgive them for taking multiple steps backward.

And yet, we can't escape the existence of the films. With a new reboot trilogy announced, the legacy — good and bad — of *The Exorcist* will continue to possess us. 💀

Following a drunken deal sealed with signatures on a soggy napkin back in 1996, writer/director Neil Marshall and producer Keith Bell, who met in the late '80s at Newcastle Polytechnic, experienced a whirlwind of knockbacks and false starts launching their first project, *Dog Soldiers*, together.

DOG SOLDIERS AT 20

By Janine Pipe

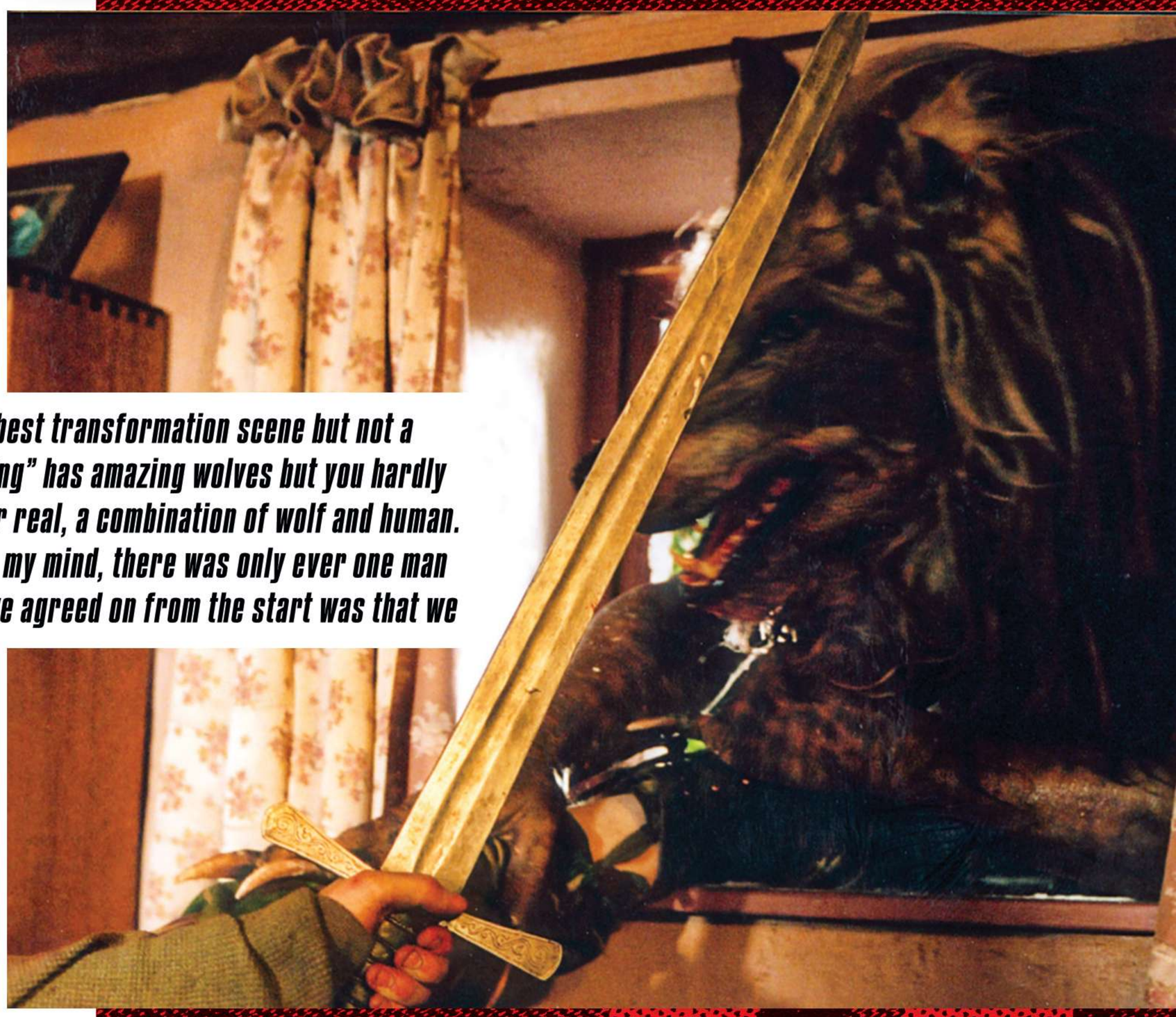
ALL PHOTOS IN THIS ARTICLE ARE FROM THE PERSONAL COLLECTION OF NEIL MARSHALL.

Eventually they were able to secure financing from American producer David E. Allen, of Kismet Films, and at that point Marshall found himself in a strong spot: having had five years and 18 versions of the script to play with, the filmmaker not only knew the plot forwards and backwards, he also knew exactly what sort of aesthetic he wanted for his soldiers-vs.-werewolves creature feature.

As it happens, what he wanted was dark and gritty, with fluid camera-work and razor-sharp edits that would allow the viewer to follow the action beat for beat. The occasional use of Dutch angles would add to the tension and pay homage to one of Marshall's touchstone films, Sam Raimi's *The Evil Dead*, and would occur alongside all manner of tributes, nods and Easter Eggs to various other favorites. Star Sean Pertwee, who plays Sgt. Wells in Marshall's film, admits that most of the cast didn't know they were quoting from *Star Trek* or what *Zabriskie Point* was, and even now he says that some of the homages have escaped him (although he was pleased to have kept his own *Zulu* reference through the final edit).

A variety of decisions were made to ensure that the film came in on-budget (shooting Luxembourg for the Scottish Highlands; shooting on 16mm rather than 35mm, and so on), but one area of the production was given special consideration: the design of the werewolves themselves. Back when Marshall and Bell were still in prep, their friend Colin Lang had drawn a wolf for them. Marshall loved the look and never strayed far from that original concept art, and adds:

SUIT UP: THINGS GET HAIRY FOR PERFORMER BEN WRIGHT AND MAKEUP FX ARTIST PETE HAWKINS.



"American Werewolf in London" has the best transformation scene but not a great looking werewolf. Then "The Howling" has amazing wolves but you hardly ever see them. I wanted mine to be hyper real, a combination of wolf and human. A hybrid, bipedal seven-foot monster. In my mind, there was only ever one man for the job – Bob Keen. And something we agreed on from the start was that we wanted big, kick-arse creatures.

The SFX team was, indeed, headed up by Keen, who already had a plethora of notable credits under his belt, including work on *Hellraiser*, *Candyman* and *Event Horizon*. He and his team were given twelve weeks to design and make the creatures, and their first order of business was watching as many werewolf movies as they could to see what other FX artists had done, so that *they* could zig where others zagged.

This proved to be something of a tall order: the lycanthrope has gone through many variations on film over the years, and from the extremely basic make-up in 1935's *Werewolf of London* and Lon Chaney Jr.'s classic *The Wolf Man* (1941) to the game-changing practical FX milestones of the '80s and the wobbly CGI of 1997's *American Werewolf in Paris*, audiences had seen it all.

Dave Bonneywell joined Keen as Special Makeup Effects Supervisor and the main werewolf designer, along with Pete Hawkins, Matt O'Toole, Justin Pitkethly and Anthony Parker, among others. They designed all sorts of props and instruments and blood-spurting gags to bring Marshall's vision to life, while Marshall had the ingenious idea to use dancers rather than burly stuntmen to play the wolves, as he wanted the creatures to be graceful in their movement. This juxtaposition delivers a definite, distinctive appearance. Said Bonneywell:

The costume had a sort of pulled in chest and ribcage, like a whippet rather than a big muscle suit. We kept the upper arms quite skinny and close to human, which then extended down to fatter forearms and giant, almost comical hands. Same with the legs, skinny up top and then got fatter as they reached the stilted leg extensions. It was quite a stylized look. To help the wolf performers move in the leg extensions we were going to support them on wires for the big action scenes but when we got to Luxembourg and saw the sets we realized this wasn't going to be possible, we just couldn't get a flying rig in there. One of my favorite moments in the movie is when the wolves are charging down the corridor towards the bedroom and as they move they're slamming their hands into the corridor walls... it's a very powerful image and makes them look terrifying as they rip the place up. But it was simply Brian Claxton Payne, the lead wolf performer helping to support himself and turning what might have been a disadvantage into part of his performance.

MAKEUP FX ARTIST MATT O'TOOLE AND HIS WARES (WERES?).

The head itself had 24 servo motors for movement including the ears, eyebrows, eyes, nose, lips and full jaw – all of which added authenticity to the costume.

> ***My original idea was to have something a bit more demonic but Neil was insistent they should have 'real' wolf heads. I wasn't entirely convinced but he was the boss. Of course, he was absolutely right and the final result was both elegant AND monstrous.***

Keen stated that latex won over CGI in this particular movie; without it, all the slime, blood and viscera wouldn't have looked so realistic. It must have worked, too: Pertwee remembers looking up and seeing the creature for the first time and being shocked, saying, "They were really quite frightening."

They also needed, well, a few tweaks along the way. Adds Bonneywell:

> ***In the final design I presented the wolves had really long fingers and talons which Neil loved and that's how we started to build them. But then I got the final script! The werewolves were grabbing things using weapons (including shooting a gun!), punching through walls and doors, and I realized that there was no way they'd do any of that with these humongous fingers and claws. I remember phoning Neil and asking just how in love with the idea he was and asked if we could ditch it for something more practical, to which he agreed.***

Meanwhile, production manager Simon Bowles and his team built the exterior cottage set from scratch, with just the sides that would be seen on camera. The interior sets were built inside the studio, the rooms dressed to fit the storyline of a family having been there for a long time and filled the home with various knickknacks, many of which Spoon (Darren Morfitt) ends up using as improvised weapons. This was another massive advantage of shooting chronologically, as the cast could smash things up without

A LUXEMBOURG ART STUDENT PAYS HER DUES.

ABOVE AND FACING PAGE: AN ARRAY OF THE MAYHEM IN *DOG SOLDIERS*.

worrying about the cost of replacing them. They also used scale models to blow things up. Kevin McKidd (Cooper) recalls the moment fondly:

> ***We were watching these expert model makers painstakingly recreate the cottage in miniature with real intricate detail, laying these tiny tiles on the roof. None of us had ever seen anything like it, it was just up there on the sound stage as we were filming. Then one day, before a load of the lads went home before the end of the shoot, it was time to blow it up. We were on a break, so we all sat round to watch it. There were about fifteen cameras all on slo-mo covering all the different angles as they had one shot to do it. And then they blew it up, and that was pretty cool watching this exact model of the house explode.***

Of course, you can't talk about the visuals of *Dog Soldiers* without talking about Sergeant Wells' guts, which were actual sausage matter to begin with before being shipped off to have their interiors replaced with something that wouldn't rot and cause the rest of the cast to gag whenever Pertwee was around. Says O'Toole:

> ***It was Dave's idea to use the sausage skin and fill with gelatine, but I think it took a bunch of us to kinda hold and pour then quickly put them in cold water in a kinda squiggly guts shape, just so the gelatine didn't all swell at the bottom and lose the shape. It was a tremendous amount of fun, as we all took it super seriously but were still kinda goofy kids, so anything that was going to be a 'gag' we all just seemed to pile in with gusto, particularly [with the] blood and gore.***

Dog Soldiers may be celebrating its 20th anniversary this year, but the wise decision from Marshall to keep things practical ensures it remains ageless, still holding up in terms of effects and visuals as well in the film's stellar storytelling and credible characters. Testament to its success is the fact that the longer awaited sequel is still the thing fans ask Marshall and many of the cast members about first, no matter what new project they are being interviewed for. While that might still be up in the air for now (the rights do not belong to Marshall at this time), both he and McKidd have teased it could be closer than ever.

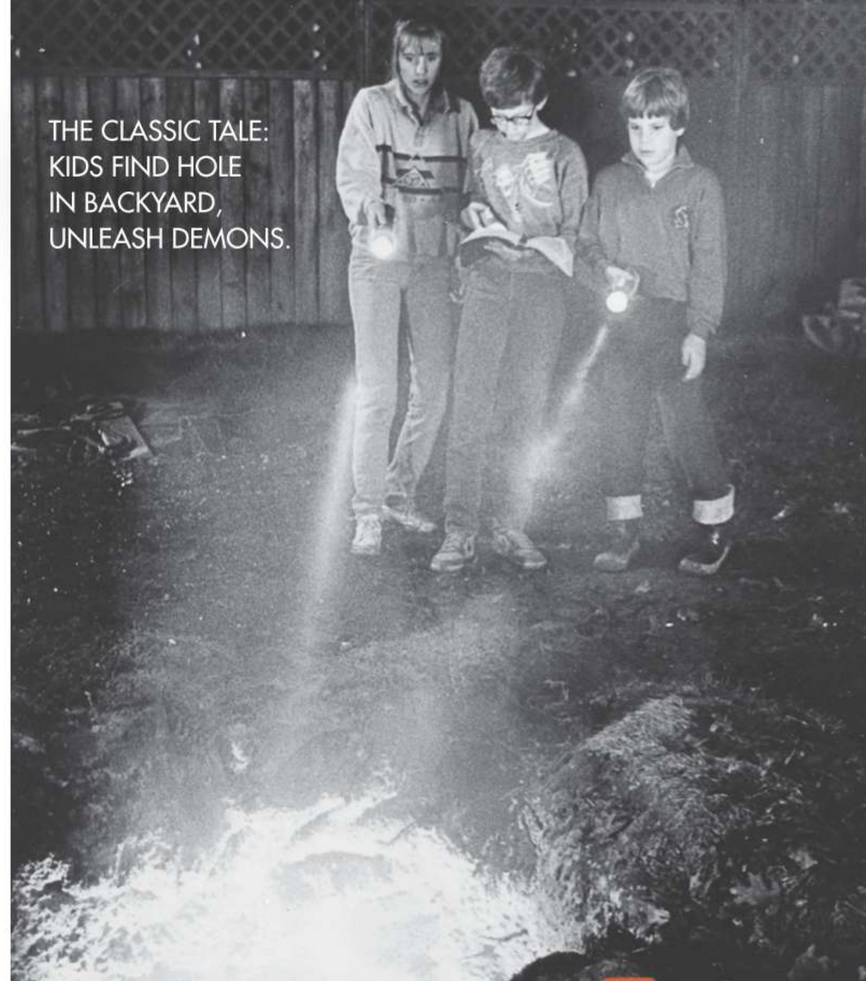
So don't throw away that lucky rabbit's paw yet! The gang may be a little older, but we can still hope for a continuation of Cooper's story on our screens one day. Let's just hope he hasn't encountered any spider-women in the meantime... 💀

ADOLESCENCE IS HELL:

THE GATE AT 35

By Heather Wixson

Growing up can be hell for anyone. But for a group of unsuspecting tweens in 1980s Canada, adolescence proved to be downright demonic in Tibor Takács' family-friendly horror fairy tale, *The Gate*. Released on May 15, 1987, by indie shingle New Century Entertainment, and starring a group of up-and-coming talent (including a young Stephen Dorff in his very first role), *The Gate* was one of those rare kids movies that dared to put its young characters in extreme peril while also forcing them to contend with the horrors of impending adulthood. A mix of dream logic, supernatural forces, and heavy metal, *The Gate* stands out as a triumphant debut feature from Takács but also as an imaginative showcase for the magic of special effects, courtesy of Randall William Cook, that became an entry point for many fans into the world of horror.



In *The Gate*, rocket enthusiast Glen (Dorff) encounters a portal to hell in his backyard that he unknowingly unlocks with the help of his best pal Terry (Louis Tripp). When his parents decide to take off for a weekend, Glen is left in the care of his older sister Alexandra AKA "Al" (Christa Denton), with the duo unaware of the danger that is lurking about courtesy of the gaping hole. Terry, who is also dealing with an absentee parent, decides to hang out with his bestie for the weekend. And after the boys crack open a seemingly innocuous geode they found in the eponymous location, and accidentally recite a powerful incantation (I guess these kids never watched *The Evil Dead*), demonic forces begin to invade their home in various forms, including reanimated corpses, an onslaught of tiny malevolent minions, and eventually the oversized "Old God" whom Glen must defeat in order to stop the evil from taking over the world.

At the time he was approached by producer John Kemeny to direct *The Gate*, Takács was looking to adapt the book *The Girl Who Owned a City* by O.T. Nelson, a story centered around some tweens left to fend for themselves in a post-apocalyptic world where all the adults have died,

making his interest in directing *The Gate* extremely understandable, especially given how the kids in the film are the main focus on the narrative. In fact, the adults in *The Gate* are total non-entities, to the point where Al and Glen's parents aren't even given names - they're known simply as "Mom" and "Dad." And in the case of Terry's parents, his mom is recently deceased and his dad's only "appearance" in *The Gate* comes in the form of a note left on the refrigerator, leaving these tweens completely on their own.

The original script for *The Gate*, written by Michael Nankin, was markedly different than what we see in the final version of the film, where the story was centered around a pair of brothers who were a bit younger, and the tone was a lot darker and more violent as well, complete with an entrail-laden demonic big baddie. But because of his own interest in fairy tales, and the relationship that he shared with his older sister, Takács decided that he wanted to infuse the project with a bit more enchantment and also give *The Gate*'s story something of a feminine touch.

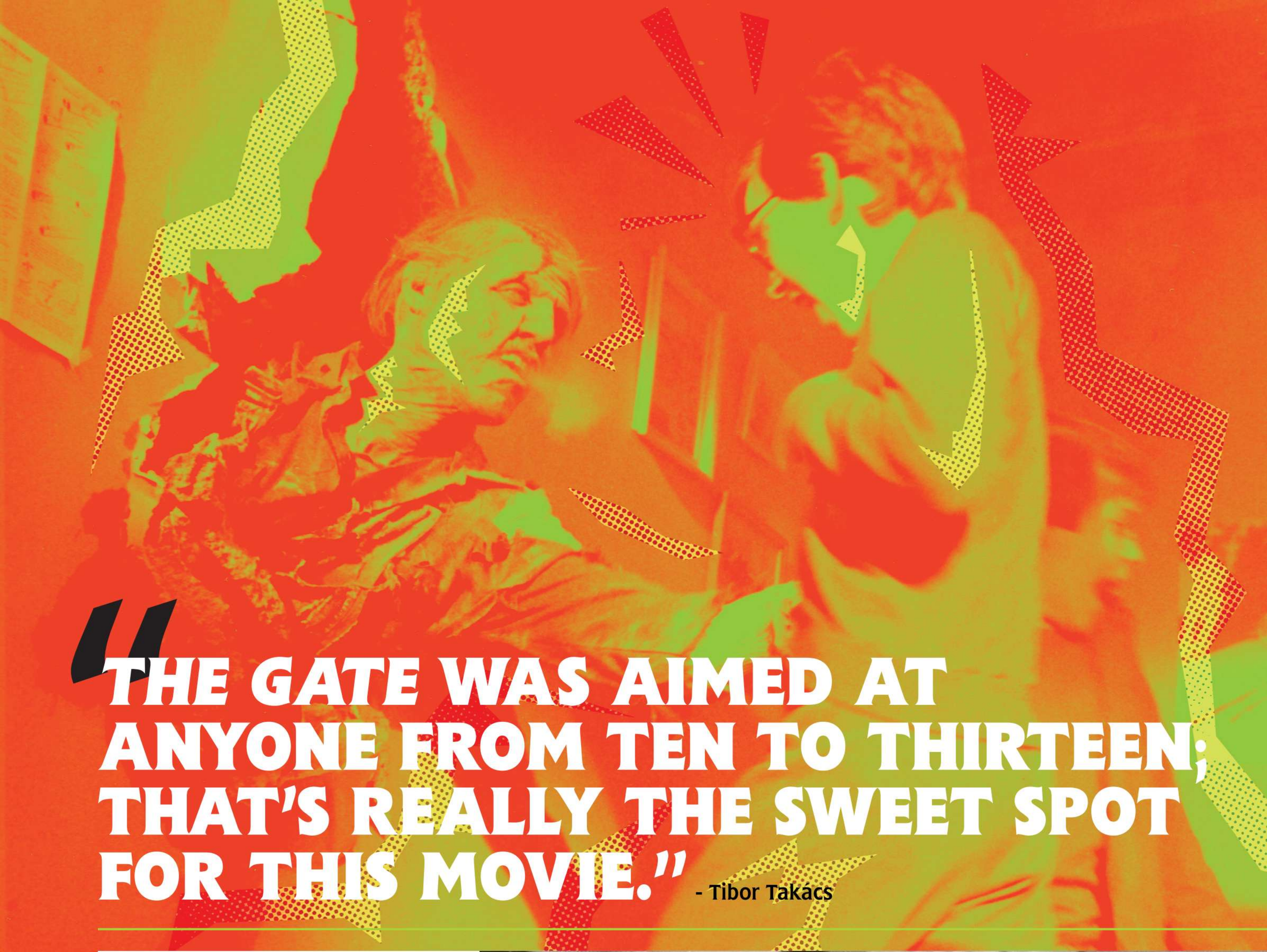
"The idea of enchantment always struck a chord with me, especially when I was a child," Takács explained. "As a filmmaker, I had always wanted to do things that were like fairy tales because I feel like they are an important part of everyone's development and they can enhance your creativity, too. When I was little and I saw *Snow White*, it scared me because I was a little kid. But it also fueled my imagination. And when I was Glen's age, I had a very strong relationship with my sister and we were the ones that experienced all these kinds of enchantments together when we were growing up. That's why I liked the idea of having a female perspective in *The Gate*. That to me was important. It would have just been a boys' movie otherwise and I felt like both girls and boys are interested in horror so I wanted to see that represented here."

And while *The Gate* is very much intended to be a kid-friendly film, Takács wasn't about to take it easy on his young protagonists, as he quite literally puts the trio of characters at the heart of this story through hell. The filmmaker also understood going into *The Gate* that fear is a healthy thing for children of all ages to experience, which meant he wasn't ready to pull back on some of the scares or the gore, either. "When I deal with children, I try to treat them like they're adults, in a way, because they're smart. They can often handle more than us adults realize and I respect kids enough to be straightforward with them and to not pussyfoot around too much. When we set out to make *The Gate*, it was aimed at anyone from ten to thirteen"; that's really the sweet spot for this movie. Anybody younger might be a little traumatized and anyone older might not think it's scary enough.

"Before we started shooting, I had a lot of time to work with Michael on the script so we could work all these ideas into it - themes like peer pressure, of growing up too fast, of abandonment. Then there's all the occult and demon worship stuff, too, which aren't your typical subjects for any kid's movie. We definitely pushed things as far as we could with *The Gate*.

He adds, "One of my favorite scenes in the movie is where they're stuck in the house and the minions appear in the bedroom after the worker falls apart. That's already a lot for them to deal with, but as they go running out of the house, that's when Glen and Al's parents show up. Or so the kids think. But then the mom starts laughing at

CHRISTA DENTON, STEPHEN DORFF AND LOUIS TRIPP, ROCKING THE OLD '80S TROPE OF BLAMING HEAVY METAL.



"THE GATE WAS AIMED AT ANYONE FROM TEN TO THIRTEEN; THAT'S REALLY THE SWEET SPOT FOR THIS MOVIE." - Tibor Takács

them maniacally and the dad looks at Glen, and he ominously says, 'You've been bad.' We wanted to keep people on their toes but I don't think anyone was expecting the dad's face to start dissolving like an old, rotten pumpkin when Glen pushes him away. That was just our way of being as aggressive with the horror as much as we could, without taking it too far.

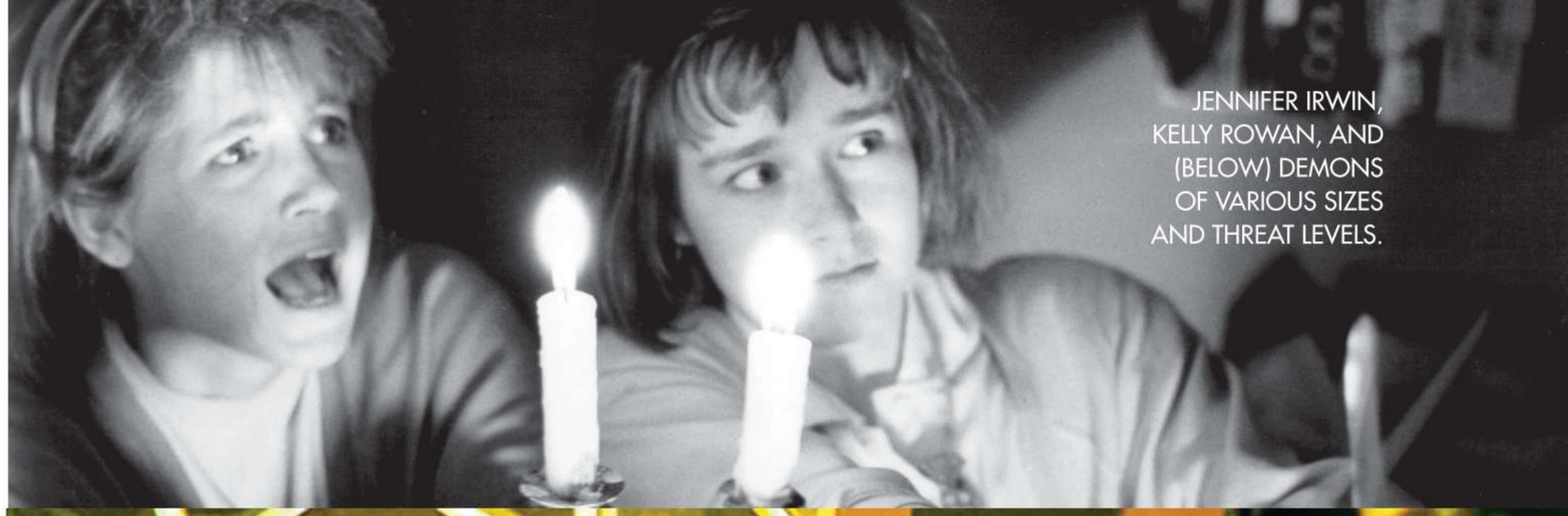
"But I still think that's a very pivotal moment in *The Gate* - the scene with Glen and the giant demon at the end of the film was another. We needed to have that moment where Glen truly grows up and faces his fears straight on to bring the story full circle," Takács added.

While there have been countless horror movies aimed at kids over the years, *The Gate* somehow still manages to be something of a singular experience. A modern-day fairy tale with just enough macabre undertones to it that it would undoubtedly stick with viewers, but it wasn't so grisly that it would send tots to therapy for years

KIDS WITH SHOTGUNS! AH, THE '80S.

into the future. Takács always believed that the work that he and his cast and crew were doing on *The Gate* was destined to become a touchstone cinematic experience for a certain audience, and he's thrilled that after all these years, the film continues to stand the test of time.

"When we all were making *The Gate* together, we were creating something that we all would have loved or would have enchanted us when we were young. We just all hoped that when we were finished, people would like it as much as we did. But everyone put a lot of love into this project because they felt a sense of ownership, like they understood they were making something special and so everyone put more into it than they had to. When that happens, it always comes across on the screen. I think it was everyone's passion that made *The Gate* as good as it is - and we're still talking about it today." 💀



JENNIFER IRWIN, KELLY ROWAN, AND (BELOW) DEMONS OF VARIOUS SIZES AND THREAT LEVELS.

"WE DEFINITELY PUSHED THINGS AS FAR AS WE COULD."

- Tibor Takács

By Richard Newby

OF CULTS AND CAGES: THE SLIPPERY SLOPE OF "COMMUNITY" IN HORROR

The concept of togetherness can quickly turn into sour ground - but it's often ripe soil for genre themes.

Think about the people you consider your community. Your family, your friends, your church, your neighbors, perhaps your fellow horror fans and social media followers. What stories would people tell about them? What stories do they tell you about those outside of your community? We all want to belong to and believe in something on some level, even the most antisocial and agnostic of us. Community provides us the chance to feel seen, to feel protected, and believe in something that makes us feel special, even if what we believe in isn't necessarily true, even if what we believe in is dangerous and requires certain... sacrifices.

PHOTO: EIKE SCHROTER/NETFLIX © 2021

Horror is populated by little communities hiding big secrets: Innsmouth, Castle Rock, Summerisle, Silent Hill, and so on. The genre has taught us that communities are breeding grounds for terror, and the more isolated, the easier they can be manipulated, leaving the truth obscured in favor of the comforts of willful ignorance. What frightens me is how easily a community can change, become something other than what was originally intended. I don't simply mean in terms of people moving in and out of a group or area. On a fundamental level, communities, no matter how exclusive we may attempt to make them, rarely end up what they started out as. Sub-communities emerge, new beliefs are made a key part of the collective identity, and compromises are made.

Online communities can be horror stories in themselves. We've fashioned idols out of 1s and 0s, set ablaze others' lives and careers within cyber wicker men, turned online presence into a religion. Or is it a cult? Entire internet movements have been built off lies, just as we have seen in real world history. The methodology of dishonest communities is the same from Nazi Germany to the bi-partisan patriotism that cheered the infinite wars of the 2000s to Joe Rogan's current anti-vax experience. The internet continues to prove the already proven: our political affiliation, our religion, the news stations we tune into, and even our fandoms can be welded together in such a way as to form a cage in which nothing but the information we want to believe, and only the community we've given ourselves to, can encroach.

A new Twitter feature set to launch this year, "Flock," will allow users to create an exclusive group, up to 150 accounts, who can see and respond to their tweets on a private feed. But I also wonder if this tool only allows for the easier creation of an echo chamber in which communities form to commiserate their respective loss of freedoms, power, white identity, and the genre they'll consistently swear was better in their day. Surely there will be some overlap in those departments. On one hand, fuck 'em. Fuck the trolls and reply guys. Hell, let's put more drag queens on the covers of FANGORIA. Get with the future or get left in the past. On the other hand, I fear what they might accomplish when out of sight from those whose power to thoroughly drag a tweet has quashed many an untruth or unacceptable idea.

Mike Flanagan knows all about the power of community. He built one and set it ablaze. I'm referring to Crockett Island, the setting of Flanagan's brilliant miniseries, *Midnight Mass*, in which the arrival of a charismatic young priest changes the dynamics of a small Catholic community, and a supernatural presence feeds from the deeply rooted prejudices already there. Flanagan, who spent part of his youth growing up on Governor's Island, inhabited then by Coast Guards and their families, tells FANGORIA, "There's something just kind of utterly unique about being in a closed system and how you interact with each other. Those small communities develop their own rhythms, their own rules and their own expectations about how every interaction is going

This idea of a community being chosen by some higher power suggests not only are these people different from outsiders, but better than them, and free of the human flaws that affect others.

(THIS PAGE AND PREVIOUS): COMMUNITY GONE WRONG IN *MIDNIGHT MASS*.

PHOTO: EIKE SCHROTER/NETFLIX © 2021

to go. All it takes is one personality to completely change that." Although Governor's Island played a role in shaping Crockett Island, Flanagan credits Tangier Island, Virginia, as the most similar in terms of aesthetics, from its population of about 400 souls, some of whose surnames were utilized for characters, to its Uppards. "I was utterly fascinated how a community in America could be that cut off from the rest of the country that it almost seems to have developed its own government, and its own language. They only have to answer to each other, so the idea different belief systems and behaviors can not only take root but grow utterly unchallenged, and infiltrate a community, is riveting."

This idea of an isolated community existing within America but outside of watchful eyes is central to M. Night Shyamalan's *The Village* (2004). The small, seemingly 19th-century community of pious elders and their descendants (whose only threat lies in the surrounding forest, "Those We Don't Speak Of") find its seclusion threatened. Covington, founded on the idea of protecting its inhabitants from grief, is forced to reckon with the consequences of their sheltered existence in the aftermath of a shocking crime born of love and jealousy. Ivy Walker's (Bryce Dallas Howard) journey through the woods to obtain medicine to save the life of her fiancé, Lucius (Joaquin Phoenix), reveals Covington exists in modern day Pennsylvania, and the village lies on the grounds of a nature preserve built by individuals from a grief group whose horrific losses decades prior forced them to abandon the modern world, and limit the knowledge of it from their children.

Covington, like Crockett, is governed by fears of mortality. "Who do you think will continue this place, this life? Do you plan to live forever? It is in them that our future lies," Edward Walker (William Hurt) tells the elders. There is a certain nobility in Covington's will to continue, though Shyamalan does not address the inherent stagnation of a community built entirely of white people whose science and literature only extend up to some point in the 1800s. Is that a worthy sacrifice in the name of preserving innocence? At the time of writing this, books like *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Maus*, and *Beloved* are being banned in certain school districts across the country as communities build boogeymen out of critical race theory, queer studies, Judaism, all to control history. Parents and politicians who stand behind such censorship claim it's to protect their children. From whom? From those outside of the community. This isn't to say Covington is governed by these same prejudices, but it's easy to see how the concept of protecting innocence becomes conflated with advocating for ignorance, xenophobia, intolerance.

Despite the flaws in Covington's structure, there is an intentional reckoning with mortality, an acknowledgement that the power of elders must be relinquished one day, and the village may change, hopefully for the better. In *Midnight Mass*, facing mortality comes with greater difficulty, because unlike the semi-recently constructed folklore of Covington, Crockett has faith in something much older, more powerful, and frightening

THE VILLAGE: COMMUNITY AS ECHO CHAMBER.

than red-cloaked beasts in the woods: religion. Crockett finds itself at the mercy of multiple personalities whose belief systems, the way in which they worship, or don't, change the communal rhythm of faith. Riley (Zach Gilford), Erin (Kate Siegel), Sheriff Hassan (Rahul Kohli), Bev (Samantha Sloyan), and Father Paul (Hamish Linklater), all throw Crockett, "the Crock Pot," into chaos, though they all do this with the best of intentions – or, at least in Bev's case, what they want to believe are the best of intentions. Again, truth is a fickle mistress when it becomes tied to desire, and desire is a catalyst born of absence.

Nothing shapes a community quite like absence – a person, an ideal, a love, a sense of self. In *Midnight Mass*, its hidden grief - the challenge to communicate it and the absence of others who might understand it — serve as the central characters' crosses to bear. For Bev, it's the unspoken grief of being talked over, of being invisible, of being ancillary in the eyes of the dogmatic Catholic Church in which women can only achieve so much. For Father Paul, secretly the aged Father Pruitt, the grief over the life he could have had, the wife and child he could have grown old with, become the singular purpose for his return to Crockett. His deal with the vampiric "angel" to recapture his youth and be given a second chance is obscured under a seemingly higher purpose of delivering miracles to the community of Crockett, a community convinced they have been chosen by God. While Bev and Father Paul initially make for a united front, a wedge grows between them as both seek to fill their respective absences and drag the entire community down with them.

This idea of a community being chosen by some higher power suggests not only are these people different from outsiders, but better than them, and free of the human flaws that affect others. Many of the inhabitants of Crockett, largely thanks to Bev's motivations, believe freedom from flaws grants them the gift of the divine in the form of immortality. This isn't so different from evangelicals who believe their Christianity will protect them from the need for vaccines. It's so much easier to believe your community is exemplary when information about those outside of it is limited. Despite its modern setting, Crockett is largely devoid of cell phones, televisions, and internet. The mainland might as well be another world, and thus the social progresses occurring there are largely absent on Crockett, in which religions outside of Christianity, homosexuality, and therapy are not only seen as strange but often treated with hostile judgment, all under the guise of following the Bible. So, at what point does something well-intentioned, which it seems most religious communities start out as, become something else? When does a community become a cult?

Flanagan, himself fascinated by cults and citing the ignoble end of Peoples Temple cult leader Jim Jones as a parallel to Bev's own perfectly undignified attempt to stave off death, noted Christianity is not unique in religion's potential to become corrupted. "I think any religion, its rules, its dogmas, its belief systems only matter insomuch as its community agrees upon. Even the most mainstream and moderate versions of Christianity, or any religion, are only functioning because they've cherry-picked the text so we're not killing people for violating trivial Old Testament commandments. It's this constant negotiation, and I think that negotiation has a built-in system of checks and balances when it's conducted over a large group of believers transparently." What becomes clear about Crockett over the course of *Midnight Mass* is that transparency becomes nonexistent until you end up with Bev waging a holy war against those who will not accept the blood of the angel. At this point Crockett is no longer worshipping God or loving thy neighbor. Its religion has become perverted, grown out of Father Paul's control, and transformed into a cult led by Bev. "When the individual's opinion begins to carry much more weight, without being able to compare things, without being able to see what the rest of society has agreed to behave like, dumb ideas that otherwise wouldn't get traction can absolutely flourish. It's the point at which a community is no longer scrutinized by people outside of it," says Flanagan.

Much like the ending of *Midnight Mass*, *Midsommar* ends in flames, both healing reminders of what a community at its best should be: a support system, even in the aftermath of terrible violence.

Bev's crusade relies on isolation, specifically the young, like Ali Hassan (Rahul Abburi) who is not only questioning his place in the community and longing to fit in, but also desperately wants to see belief validated by miracles, something his parents' Muslim faith isn't providing him. Although these miracles are a lie, Ali is led to believe he is anointed, chosen, part of the flock. Flanagan emphasizes that most cults go after young individuals who have suffered a loss, and seek to isolate them from friends and family, while cult leaders position themselves as the replacement for those friends and family. There is something motherly about the way in which Bev draws people to her and shapes this sub-community within Crockett, and once people start seeing their families and friends join, it becomes impossible to resist. "All of their emotional needs are being met by this group, and if you start to

then put conditions on that, it's pretty insidious," Flanagan says of those conscripted into cults.

Can what we originally thought of as a cult be transformed or revealed as something well-intentioned? It certainly seems plausible, at least from Dani's (Florence Pugh) perspective in Ari Aster's *Midsommar*. This fulfillment of an emotional need is the foundation on which the Hårga exists. It's easy to see why Dani, young and suffering from a loss, might be drawn to a cult. But she isn't; in fact, she is horrified by and resists the religious traditions of the Hårga. If there's any manipulative cult that she finds herself part of, it's that of her deliberately named boyfriend, Christian (Jack Reynor) and his friends, who gaslight and attempt to deny her emotions. "Dani, do you feel held by him? Does he feel like home to you?" Pele (Vilhelm Blomgren), their host, asks her. It appears Aster is intentionally taking all we fear about isolated communities and subverting them. This isn't to suggest the Hårga are #CommunityGoals, but at least when it comes to Dani's place among them, she is provided transparency, and her grief is shared, understood, and the absence left by the death of her family, their mortality, filled and acknowledged. Sacrifices are made, but the truth of what that entails are not obscured.

Much like the ending of *Midnight Mass*, *Midsommar* ends in flames, both healing reminders of what a community at its best should be: a support system, even in the aftermath of terrible violence. What's interesting is both horror stories are coming at community from different places, from pagan worship and Christianity, and yet unlike so much horror born from those religions, they end on a note of hope. That's not madness in Dani's eyes at the end, but freedom from the constraints placed upon her by her previous community. On the ending of *Midnight Mass*, Flanagan says, "I may not have faith in a God; I do have faith in people and so that ending for me was a wish, and the closest I come to a prayer. I think it's something we all have the capacity for and time and again there are beautiful stories throughout history of human beings finally brought to that brink who put down the weapons and who put down the hate and put down the things that divide and animate us so often in life and, without the promise of heaven or the threat of hell, greet each other with grace."

I wonder, when the story of your community, digital or physical, is told will it be a story of hope, change, and grace? Or will it be the story of a cult, one that obscured the truth for the sake of its continued survival? In either case, sacrifices will have been made to fill the absence that ensures your sense of belonging, which will undoubtedly leave an absence somewhere else, with someone else. A dark space in which there's always another well-intentioned leader, another mentor, another cult leader, another Bev Keane. Are they already here? Moving in across the street or taking over the cubicle in your office? Setting up a new account? Or are they somewhere waiting in the wings, maybe living unchecked inside your head? You've got followers. You've got ideas. You've got a means to start a community, a cage through which information can be filtered. Do you trust yourself enough to start building? 💀

WRONG TO BELONG: IN *MIDSOMMAR*, "FEELING HELD" ISN'T ALL IT'S CRACKED UP TO BE.

THE HORRIFIC ACTION OF TIMO TJAHJANTO

BY BRANDON STREUSSNIG

BLURRING THE LINES: *THE NIGHT COMES FOR US* (LEFT) AND *MAY THE DEVIL TAKE YOU* (RIGHT).

THE SNAP OF AN ELBOW. A GEYSER OF BLOOD. THE SICKENING CRUNCH OF A SKULL. SURELY YOU KNOW THE BEATS OF A SADISTIC KILLER TAKING APART ITS PREY. PERHAPS THIS IS LEATHERFACE DISSECTING YET ANOTHER VICTIM. WHAT IF IT WASN'T? WHAT IF, INSTEAD, THIS WERE A HIGHLY TRAINED FIGHTER'S GRISLY END AT THE HANDS OF ANOTHER?

Action and horror aren't genres one tends to associate with one another. Sure, the stomach-dropping thrill of Tom Cruise scaling the Burj Khalifa elicits a vaguely similar reaction as the shark prowling the waters in *Jaws*, but rarely is the connection explicit. Dig a little beneath the surface, however, and you find plenty of filmmakers trying to thread that particular needle. In action's 1980s heyday, films like *Cobra* or *10 to Midnight* would pair lunkheads like Stallone or Bronson against slasher-like villains. Later, filmmakers like Neil Marshall or John Hyams would seamlessly blend horror with action in barnburners like *Dog Soldiers* or *Universal Soldier: Day of Reckoning*. Renny Harlin made his name crisscrossing the genres to varied results. The overlap is plentiful, in other words, but nobody bridges the gap as fluidly as Timo Tjahjanto.

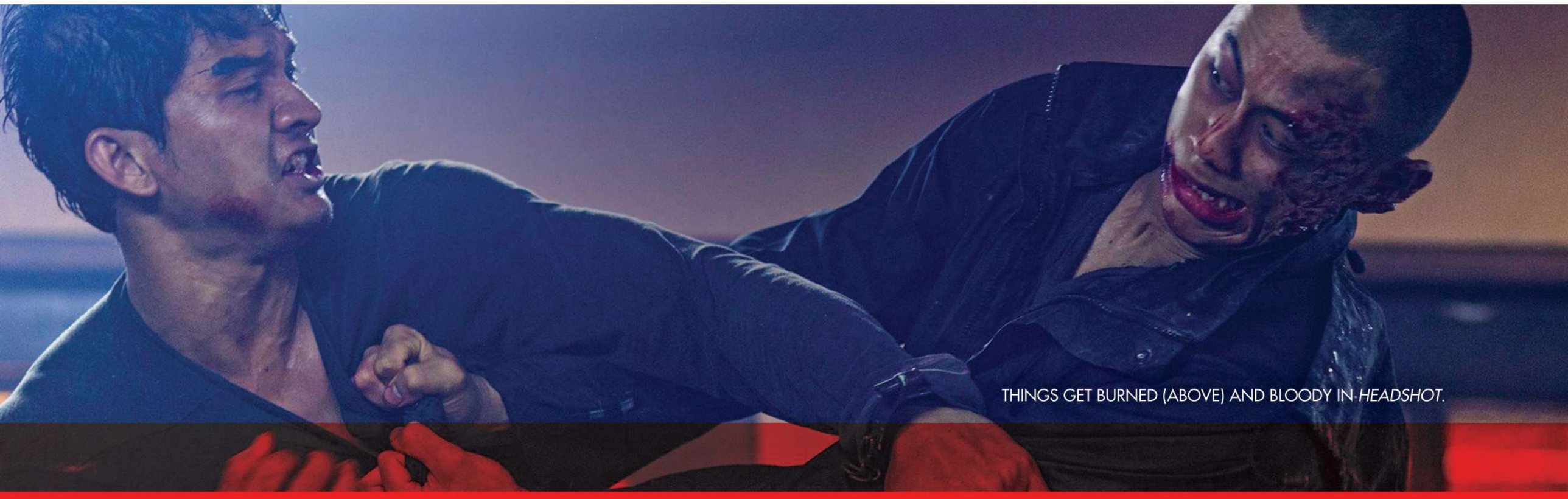
Beginning his career as one half of the Mo Brothers with Kimo Stamboel, Tjahjanto hit the scene with the modest but effective chiller *Macabre*. From there, the two would contribute to various anthology films, most famously *V/H/S 2*, where Timo collaborated with Gareth Evans on standout segment "Safe Haven." It wasn't until *Headshot*, though, that Tjahjanto, still working with Stamboel at this point, really began to blur the lines between action and horror. "I think both can complement each other while being two completely different beasts," says Tjahjanto, ruminating on the question. "Action elicits an adrenaline rush, the need for destruction and just seeing cool characters destroy and kill shit. Horror can be all those things while tapping into something more primal, something psychological. I personally think horror

has the edge on just staying with you for a long-ass time. The best example of this would be the superb way 2007's underrated *30 Days of Night* works as an action flick but also ramps on the chill and dread."

Following a fresh-from-a-coma Iko Uwais and his quest to punish who put him there, everything from *Headshot*'s lighting to production design screams "horror." Dingy, disgusting police precincts lit by sickly yellow light bulbs. An endless parade of goons for Iko to kill, all brandishing smiles that, in that light, border on terrifying. When asked whether this is conscious, Tjahjanto says, "Perhaps. I think it's very hard to let go of my horror roots. I naturally like mood and dread in my visuals and audio. I am now making an action comedy and I have to keep on reminding myself just to make the scenes more upbeat. At some point me and my DP were sitting there marveling at how our set and lighting looks like something out of *Silent Hill*, then we snap out of the spell and reconfigure it."

It's the action itself, though, that crosses over into full-on horror. Early on in *Headshot*, one of the main villain's henchmen takes a knife and repeatedly stabs a man in the face. Immediately, the martial arts transcend something that registers as "cool" and into something grotesque. It's shot like Jackie Chan disposing of some nobody in one of the classics, but the force of impact coupled with the spurts of blood cause

A MAN'S NECK IMPALED ON A KNIFE STICKING OUT OF A TABLE. BONES SNAPPED LIKE TWIGS. BY THE TIME THE CREDITS HIT, YOU WANT TO SCREAM.



THINGS GET BURNED (ABOVE) AND BLOODY IN *HEADSHOT*.

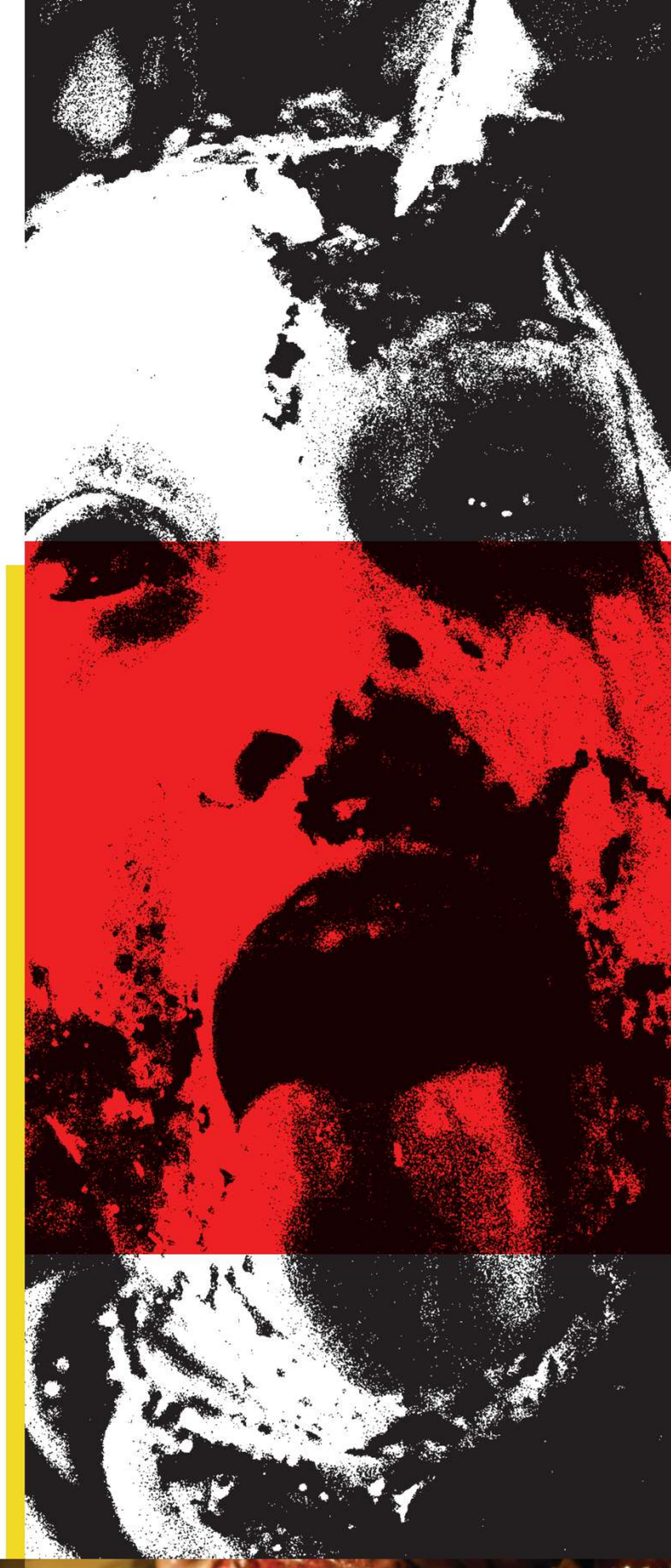
your brain to short circuit. It's like if Jason Voorhees knew Silat. Tjahjanto and Stamboel repeat this over and over until *Headshot*'s bloody climax, and the result is a dizzying, solemn finale. A bus being shot up with every soul obliterated into mush. A man's neck impaled on a knife sticking out of a table. Bones snapped like twigs. By the time the credits hit, you want to scream. It's not so much that you're rejoicing in Iko's victory. You're relieved that Iko *survived*.

Shifting gears from martial arts and breaking away from Stamboel, Tjahjanto went back to pure horror with the *May the Devil Take You* series. The first, starring the incredible Chelsea Islan, is a down and dirty *Evil Dead* pastiche. A family meets at their childhood home in a village deep in the jungles of Indonesia to discover their father's satanic secrets. The prerequisite possessions follow, and while it can feel like a restrained film coming from Tjahjanto, we still get to see him flex his action muscles in fits and starts. A rotating camera movement here, a quick cut there – he's in horror mode, but the impulse to layer in whispers of action remains. Every kill is structured like a knockdown, drag out fight. Demons fill in for hired goons, but Tjahjanto's unique pacing leaves you out of breath by the time Islan takes down her final monster. It's a remarkable feat, a final possession set piece cutting straight through you with the intensity of the best Hong Kong fist fight you've ever seen.

If *May the Devil Take You* is *Evil Dead*, *May the Devil Take You Too* is *Evil Dead 2*. Like Raimi, Tjahjanto is let off the leash. "I have no particular influence I can name specifically," Tjahjanto answers when asked if Raimi inspired him, before going on to add: "Sam Raimi has always been the guy that I want to model my career on, just a film geek who likes to try things out, never letting himself be too comfortable with one specific genre, I love his gonzo-ness in the *Evil Dead* series, just like I do Peter Jackson, early in his career. I try to emulate that same fun, anything goes spirit with the *May The Devil Take You* films."

Headshot infused action with horror and *May the Devil Take You Too* pulls the reverse to stunning effect. Where set pieces felt like fights in the first, they are fights in the second. As our new crop of dead meats (along with a returning Islan, who again outclasses her American contemporaries) fight to survive, the demons barrage them like hyper-violent furies. Scaling the ceilings and walls like they're choreographed by Yuen Woo-Ping in the midst of a mental break, Tjahjanto shoots these horrific creatures like they're graceful fighters. For his part, Tjahjanto says this was all a happy accident. "I'd kinda gotten sick of demons that shock the characters and then just poof, they vaporize, even though I fell into that trap again. I had some surreal ideas of scare gags that didnt end up happening because of budgetary constraints, so the easy way out was... okay fuck it, let's make these motherfucking demons able to physically hurt you." It's an alarming juxtaposition, their movements beautiful, their actions terrifying. Bones snap, body parts twist, victims are pummeled into bloody messes. If this were Scott Adkins vanquishing Marko Zaror in *Undisputed III*, you'd be out of your seat cheering. Here? You need the madness to stop for the sake of your own sanity.

What Tjahjanto seems to understand down to his marrow is that a desire to witness violence, be it a rousing action blow-out or a disgusting slasher kill, comes from the same place. It's an unspoken desire to see the unimaginable. There's a catharsis in watching bad guys get destroyed, but if the lens shifts ever so slightly, a broken arm in a final fight becomes a severed arm thanks to a psychotic killer. It's terrifying to be confronted with, and Timo Tjahjanto is nothing if not confrontational. His work assaults your senses and no film blends the two genres quite like *The Night Comes For Us*.



GETTING MORE THAN SKIN-DEEP IN *MAY THE DEVIL TAKE YOU*.

MAYHEM, MURDER AND MEAT IN *THE NIGHT COMES FOR US.*

In what he's called his tribute to Hong Kong's "Heroic Bloodshed" films, *The Night Comes For Us* is ostensibly about Joe Taslim's assassin Ito fighting his way through a flurry of his own people after he spares a little girl's life during a massacre. "It always starts with the character. I've been fortunate to have a pretty good idea of how I want my main anti-hero to behave and what kind of world he inhabits," he says. "Ito has always been in my head, a combination of Frank Castle meets Ogami Ittō from the *Lone Wolf and Cub* series. Both are in their comfort zone when it comes to executing sadistic kills." "Sadistic" is an understatement.

Put simply, *The Night Comes For Us* is Tjahjanto's magnum opus. A gleefully violent, astonishingly bloody film, his maximalist impulses are honed to laser-sharp precision, his marrying of action and horror, finally complete. After the brutality of the opening massacre, he tamps down the horror for a bit. Giving us time to breathe, we're treated to Iko Uwais' villain introduction, where Tjahjanto lets him show off a bit against some goons. That's the only time *The Night Comes For Us* can realistically be called a traditional martial arts film. Less an escalation and more like riding a pulsing, bloody wave, he assaults the senses in some of the most gorgeously grotesque violence ever put to screen. Messy gore and wet, thudding blows are the appetizers, the main course more focused on genre staples. A butcher shop fight becomes *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* as Joe Taslim hangs his enemies from meat hooks, removes limbs with butcher's knives, and slices throats with a buzzsaw. When the dust settles, the corpses on the floor are indistinguishable from the cow carcasses hanging above. "It's just something of a cheat that adds to the visceral tone," he says. "If you've been to an old slaughter house (which was our initial set before thinking it'd be way too much), then you know the smell, the rust meeting the coppery thickening blood… it's intoxicating and good for carnage."

Later, an endless horde of gang members rushes Taslim's apartment. Like zombies, they pile upon each other over and over again as the people inside desperately hold a shaky door closed. As Taslim's fight for redemption reaches its end, his violence mirrors that of a slasher. Hacking limbs and crushing skulls – it's not enough to dispose of these people; they need to be completely obliterated. If you were relieved that Iko survived *Headshot*, you come away from *The Night Comes For Us* wondering if Taslim even deserves survival.

Up next for Timo Tjahjanto is his first foray into US cinema with *Last Train to New York*, New Line's remake of *Train to Busan*. Tjahjanto is predictably tight-lipped on the film, simply offering a tantalizing, "All I can say is that when it happens… it will definitely be a treat for the senses! I'm exhausted from the constant shooting, but my mind is restless just thinking about some of the set pieces we have in store."

An English language retooling of the smash South Korean zombie film sounds like a risky proposition. One glance at Twitter comment threads and you'll find a litany of people with their knives out well before we've even seen a frame. The impulse to be angry about what on paper appears to be yet another Hollywood cash-in is understandable, but all one needs to do to alleviate that anger is to give one of Tjahjanto's films a spin. If there was anyone on earth suited to take on a zombie invasion aboard a fast-moving train, it's him. If you're still unconvinced after watching *May the Devil Take You Too* or *Headshot*, give some recent American horror a rewatch. Maybe you loved James Wan's *Malignant* and its incredible police station set piece. Gabriel kinda tears through those cops like Iko Uwais, doesn't he? Perhaps you dug Leigh Whannell's infusion of action in *The Invisible Man*. Taken as a piece, it becomes hard to ignore someone like Timo Tjahjanto's influence on those films, consciously or otherwise. There's only one Timo, however, and the prospect of the madness he can inflict with a Hollywood budget, remakes be damned, is something we should all be over the moon for. 💀

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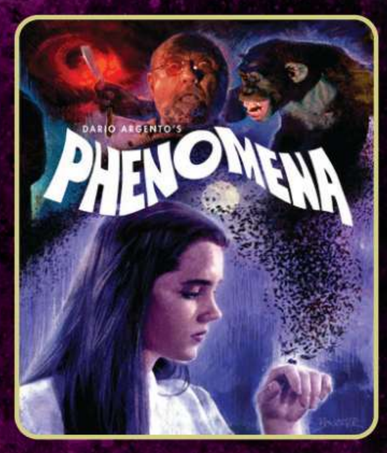

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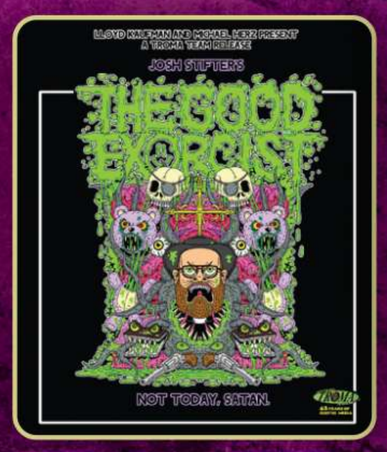

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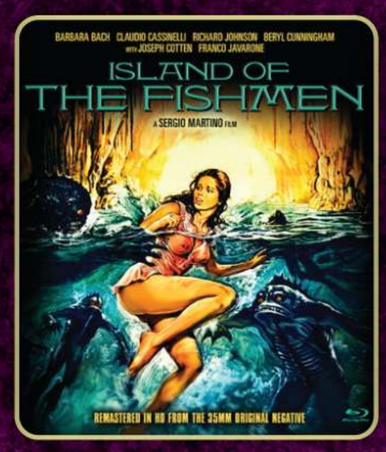
Barbara Bach Claudio Cassinelli Richard Johnson Beryl Cunningham
with Joseph Cotten Franco Javarone
Island of the Fishmen
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THE ISLAND OF THE FISHMEN

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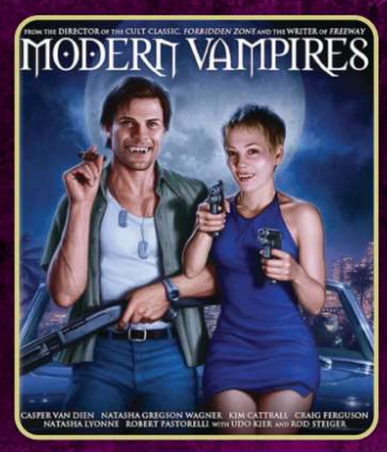
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THAT TIME ROGER CORMAN RELEASED A MOVIE UNDER THREE TITLES IN TWO MONTHS

BY MICHAEL GINGOLD

If you were a horror/exploitation fan during the drive-in/grindhouse era, it was a given that, sooner or later, you'd run into a film you'd seen before under a new title. Before VHS began offering an alternative revenue source in the early '80s, independent distributors would often send their product back onto the circuit after their initial releases under new monikers. Or they would apply different names in different territories, which is how the chiller initially titled *Communion* hit most of its cities as *Alice, Sweet Alice*, opened in a couple of others as *The Mask Murders*, and then went out again a few years later from a different company as *Holy Terror*.

Roger Corman was no stranger to this practice: while many of his B-classics were known the same way nationwide, there were times when he and his marketing team tried out a variety of titles and campaigns until they found one that worked. And they wouldn't waste time making the switch in certain cases, such as the sci-fi shocker starring Edward Albert and Erin Moran that first went out from Corman's New World Pictures on July 31, 1981, in Minneapolis, MN, and other territories as *Mind Warp: An Infinity of Terror*, with a graphic of a screaming astronaut and the tagline "It's Always Midnight In Space."

Apparently that appellation didn't draw crowds, since two weeks later, on August 14, the film opened as *Planet of Horrors* in places like Sacramento, CA, where it retained the previous artwork, and Dayton, OH, with a new illustration of a winged beastie threatening a scantily clad woman alongside the tag, "Hell Has Just Been Relocated!" This evidently didn't work either, because three weeks after that, on September 4, the movie opened in Chicago and elsewhere in the Midwest as *Galaxy of Terror*, with a new, more refined version of that monster-and-girl image. That did the trick, and the film retained that title and art for the rest of its theatrical play and all the way to its Blu-ray release.

THE NAME GAME: *GALAXY OF TERROR* AND ITS ALTERNATE MONIKERS.

While *Galaxy* became a cult favorite, a less celebrated New World picture from the following year went through a similar series of rapid promotional switcheroos. A higher-toned Canadian thriller starring Richard Chamberlain and John Houseman and telling of a madman who kills people by sending lethal jolts of electricity via telephones, it debuted in Austin and other Texas cities on July 16, 1982, as *Bells*. Not the most frightening moniker in the world, and when it opened in Atlanta, GA, on August 27, it was called *The Calling* with a fresh campaign playing off the ubiquitous AT&T slogan "Reach out and touch someone." It bore that title in other cities for a month or so, but then turned up in Tampa, FL, on October 8 as *Murder by Phone*, with the old *Bells* art and another new tagline. By the time the film arrived in Baltimore December 3, *Murder*'s ad bore the screaming-woman artwork it would carry for the rest of its run, into early 1983, and then on VHS.

This time, media columnists in Pittsburgh, at least, took notice. Both the *Post-Gazette*'s George Anderson and the *Press*' Ed Blank ran blurbs on the flick's multi-title odyssey, with the former quipping, "...under any name it's been a flop." Just to further confuse the issue, a novelization by Jon Messman was published by Signet as *Phone Call* (with the *Calling* title acknowledged on the cover), and when the film subsequently hit cable movie channels, it was back to *Bells* again. This was the original 95-minute cut of the movie; as *Murder by Phone*, it ran only 80 minutes. Did it lose those 15 at the start of its New World run, or along the way? Only a special Blu-ray edition (anyone? anyone?) might be able to let us know for sure... 💀

WE GOTTA THINK *MURDER BY PHONE* DID MORE BOX OFFICE THAN *BELLS*.

Jay of the Dead's

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Recently FANGORIA partnered with DeviantArt on a horror art contest, and one of the winners is the talented Dwayne Wingert, whose remarkable work can be seen on these pages.

DWAYNE WINGERT

Dwayne is a freelance illustrator living and working in Canada. On top of illustration, he's been training to learn game engines and other software, hoping to create the next great indie horror game or to get a chance to create special effects in the film industry.

Dwayne is an avid gamer and VR enthusiast, and as part of winning our DeviantArt contest will be commissioned to create an illustration for an upcoming issue of FANGORIA. Until then, you can check out the rest of his impressive body of work at dwaynewingert.com.

FEST FINDS

Hypochondriac

APRIL 2022

BY LISA DREYER

Premiering at SXSW, Addison Heimann's first feature is the real deal.

As a resident of Austin, TX, South by Southwest is one of my favorite times of the year. Admitting this is probably sacrilegious to other Austinites, who make a sport of complaining about who is inconvenienced the most by the traffic and influx of tourists. The gridlock is worth it to me, though, with the whole city transformed, live music everywhere, local theaters turned into festival hubs, and friends from all over the world coming into town. When the film lineup is announced I immediately jump to the festival's Midnighter section, reading with a mixture of excitement and jealousy. I love to see what genre films have made it into the relatively small section, but as a film programmer for another local festival, Fantastic Fest, I sometimes feel a pang of regret that SXSW scooped up some amazing films before we got a chance to play them.

Hypochondriac, which has its world premiere at SXSW, is definitely a film other festivals are going to be clamoring to screen. The film is Addison Heimann's feature directorial debut, which he also wrote. Heimann has written and produced several short films that have been very popular on the festival circuit, so it's exciting to see him take this leap into feature filmmaking. The film follows Will, a young artist who at first glance is living a pretty standard life. He has a steady job making pottery (with a terrible and hilariously inappropriate boss), an understanding coworker who makes the job bearable, and a supportive boyfriend. Like a lot of people, Will seems to deal with some anxiety, but when Mother's Day rolls around, things start to spiral out of control, as family secrets he's kept buried deep inside come to the surface in surprising and terrifying ways.

There are definitely some parallels to *Donnie Darko*, with the protagonist's inner demons given a physical manifestation in the form of a very creepy wolf-like creature. But the film feels fresh, with emotional resonance and a non-exploitative exploration of mental illness layered in between highly visceral and effective scares. Zach Villa is fantastic as Will, bringing a depth and complexity to his performance that anchor the entire film. It's also particularly refreshing to see the warm and genuine relationship between Will and his boyfriend play out on screen, as a queer couple working together to get through a VERY rough patch. Heimann has made exploring and championing queer stories a cornerstone of his blossoming career, and you can feel his passion and authenticity in every aspect of the film. While SXSW got to *Hypochondriac* first, I'm sure they won't be the last fest to program it, and I'm excited for horror fans everywhere to be introduced to this bold new voice in genre film. 💀

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By Scott Wampler

SLEEPWALKERS

30 YEARS OF CAT SCRATCH FEVER

Believe it or not, this year marks the 30th anniversary of the release of Mick Garris and Stephen King's *Sleepwalkers*, one of the precious few '90s horror entries brave enough to ask the question, "What if a mom and son were actually ancient cat people who fed on the souls of virgins, were sleeping together, and were also traveling from town to town all over the country on a never-ending (and profoundly horny) killing spree?"

It's all a bit more complicated than that, of course, but just a bit. *Sleepwalkers* tells the story of Charles Brady (Brian Krause) and his mother, Mary (an excellent Alice Krige), who show up in idyllic Travis, Indiana, after fleeing their latest crime scene on the Pacific coast. Travis is a quaint little burg, the sort of place you routinely find yourself transplanted to while reading King's work (you would, in fact, be forgiven if you mistook it at first glance for Castle Rock), and serves as the perfect Rockwellian backdrop for the balls-out tawdriness that ensues.

Indeed, subversion is absolutely the name of the game here – an element film critics at the time of *Sleepwalkers*' release simply didn't appreciate, and which now fuels the passionate cult that surrounds the film – and, in revisiting Garris' bonkers movie after all these years, this writer was struck by how... *gleeful* it all is. Single mother raising a son? We can make that weird, says *Sleepwalkers*. Young couple falling in love during a lovely little picnic? Oh, let's add a corkscrew to the equation! Sleepy little town where everyone's normal and plays their role with a smile? Even the local creative writing teacher seems to be wrestling with a few dark impulses. *Sleepwalkers* wants to titillate and entertain, make no mistake... but also, it clearly wants to subvert these tropes every step of the way.

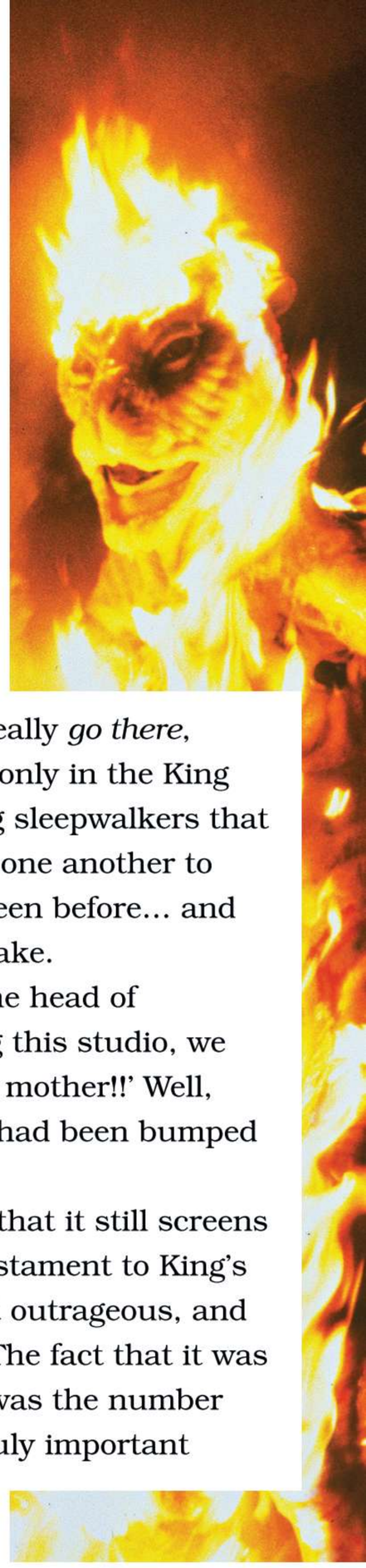
It does so, and it does so with style. The film is helped along the way by a handful of strong performances (notably Krige and the luminous Mädchen Amick, here playing the local teenage girl Charles sets his sights on), 126 cats, a series of double-take inducing cameos (Mark Hamill with a mustache! Stephen King himself, playing a self-described "country asshole!"), and a number of truly memorable VFX shots. *Sleepwalkers* was one of the first films to deploy computer-generated "morphing" technology, and lemme tell ya: One never forgets their first time seeing Charles revert to his true feline form while roaring down the backroads of Travis in a souped-up muscle car. It's a goddamn hoot.

Asked about the film's staying power and the rabid fanbase it still courts three decades later, director Mick Garris tells me:

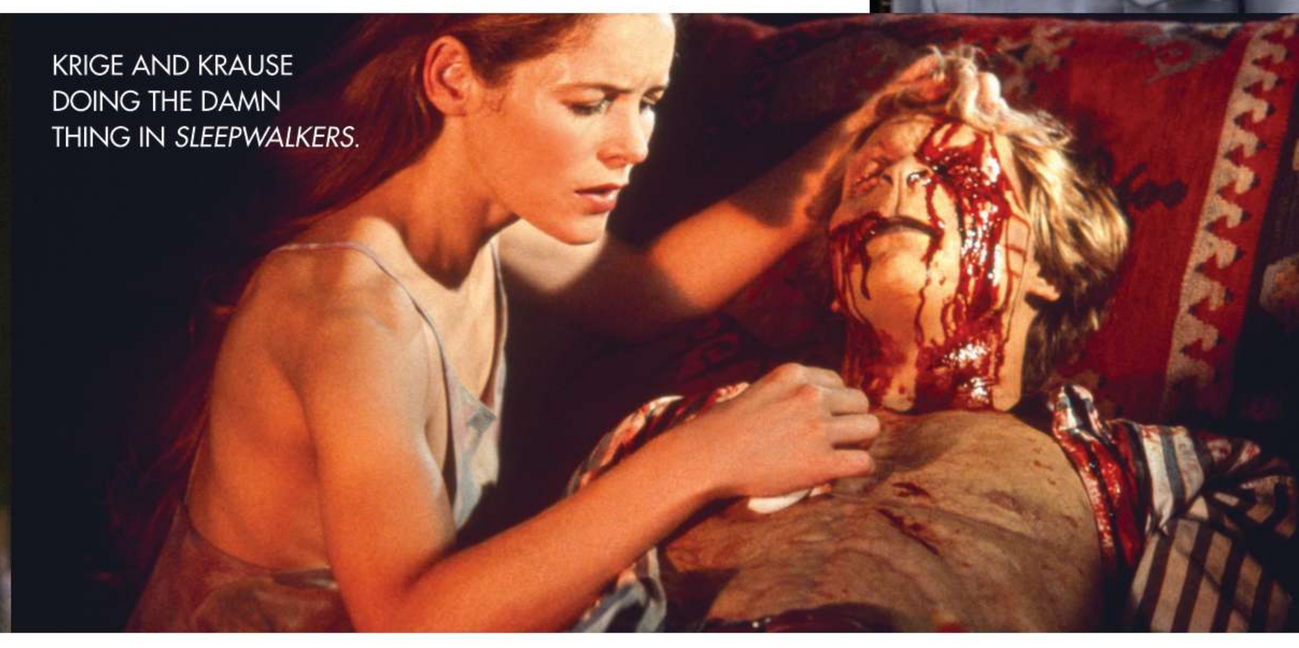
> I think the film's audaciousness, its willingness to really *go there*, embracing its twisted sexual roots, keeps it unique not only in the King canon, but in the world of horror, as well. Shapeshifting sleepwalkers that steal the life essence of human virgins and feeding it to one another to keep them immortal is a concept that I'd surely never seen before... and one I never expected a major studio like Columbia to make.
>
> In fact, when we started the film, Frank Price was the head of Columbia Pictures, and he said, 'As long as I'm running this studio, we won't ever make a movie with a boy having sex with his mother!!' Well, by the time we were into production, that was true. He had been bumped from the studio and replaced with Mark Canton.
>
> Thirty years is an eternity in film time, and the fact that it still screens at festivals and on television all these years later is a testament to King's attempt to just make a freaking monster movie, make it outrageous, and play it straight with a truly gifted and committed cast. The fact that it was bankrolled and distributed by Columbia — and that it was the number one movie in America when it came out! — make it a truly important marker in my personal and professional life."

It sure was: *Sleepwalkers* didn't just mark Garris' first studio feature as a director, but also his first collaboration with King, a creative partnership that went on to give fans TV miniseries versions of *The Stand*, *The Shining*, *Desperation* and *Bag of Bones*. Would any of those projects have come to pass had it not been for *Sleepwalkers*? It's possible, one supposes, but it's more fun to believe that's the case, so we're choosing to print the legend on that one.

Happy anniversary, *Sleepwalkers*. Here's to another thirty years of virgin sacrifices, incestuous cat people, and Mark Hammill's cop mustache. 💀



MARK HAMILL'S COP MUSTACHE.



KRIGE AND KRAUSE DOING THE DAMN THING IN *SLEEPWALKERS*.

RATED XX/XY

THE POWER

VALERIE AND HER NIGHT OF TERRORS: CORINNA FAITH'S *THE POWER*

BY ANYA STANLEY

Corinna Faith's film is powerfully atmospheric, essaying the hallowed hallways of an odd Hammer film.

In his near-biblical genre meditation *Danse Macabre*, Stephen King observes that "when the lights go out and we find ourselves stranded in a shoal of darkness, reality itself has an unpleasant way of fogging in." What can't be tamed in the sun's rays escapes from its cage come nightfall. Some of the best thrills lean into the conceit: *The Tingler* entreats its watchers to "scream, scream for your life!" to ward off death by creepy-crawly, while a refrigerator bulb illuminates Alan Arkin's Henry Roat and the climax of *Wait Until Dark*. *Lights Out* gave moviegoers another reason to sprint to bed after turning the lamp off in the past decade. Still, there's something just as remarkable about Corinna Faith's *The Power*, which slid onto audiences' radars in 2021.

A period piece set in a mid-'70s London hospital, writer-director Corinna Faith's script situates a series of planned power outages as the backdrop for a series of buoyant anxieties that a young nurse must navigate. As such, *The Power* works both as a horror picture and a reaction against systemically upheld gender dynamics, if it pleases. The subtext is ostensibly about institutional abuse, but the film finds evergreen purchase in political conversations where womens' valid concerns are dismissed as little more than attention-seeking hysteria.

Stare into any gender-focused comments section for too long, and woman-identifying readers risk a cosmic madness as though they've beheld the Great God Pan himself.

The story of *The Power* goes that in early 1970s East London, nurse trainee Valerie (Rose Williams) spent a night in the East London Royal Infirmary during power outages to reduce electricity consumption across the city, the Tory government's response to a coal miners' strike. Val appears regressive

with her stuffed toys at home and her child-like prayer recitation. There's an earnest zeal to help and heal children, which she claims to "have a feel for." The Matron (Diveen Henry) is almost repulsed by her optimism, rebuffing her "ideals" with rigid order and hierarchy, where rule infractions cost her her career and livelihood at large.

Val, cherub that she is, can't help but help somebody, which inevitably leads to an accidental challenge of Matron's authority. She finds a child in the shadows; Saba (Shakira Rahman) is seemingly lost and disoriented, or she may be hiding from the pediatrics wing. Regardless, Val escorts her back to the ward where she meets the charismatic Dr. Franklin (Charlie Carrick), who appreciates Val's knack for working with kids and insists that the Matron reassigns her to aid him. Matron obliges, but before that, she assigns Val to the evening shift at the cleared-out hospital (with a bare-bones staff due to the power cuts). In that darkness, reality creeps in.

Corinna Faith's film is powerfully atmospheric, essaying the hallowed hallways of an odd Hammer film. Following its opening, Val wakes up from a nightmare and, step by step, fills the room with light, switching on lamps and fixtures as methodically as one might count items in a room to alleviate an anxiety attack.

Within its first fifteen minutes, *The Power* feels remarkably similar to *Silent House*, where past trauma comes up as something nasty for this tormented girl with an occlusive past. It manifests in the walls and sightings, all originating from the darkest blackness imaginable. The infirmary takes on that uncanny feeling of a place that should have life but doesn't. Something you'll find in the urban rot of *It Follows* and the peeling asylum hallways of *Session 9*. DP Laura Bellingham situates the film's subjects in the maw of darkness, even after the generator kicks back on for a few moments. Like Leigh Whannell's vigilant gaze in *The Invisible Man*, the camera hides threats and unknowns in the periphery of every room, entreating the eye to search for monsters and fill in the space.

And there be monsters here. The threat of sexual violence is another element of the film's atmosphere, self-aware enough as a spooky story to allow a diegetic radio host to taunt, "Stay near that candle."

In 1975, the Yorkshire Ripper's first confirmed victim, Wilma McCann, would surface, launching a reign of terror that would leave the women of West Yorkshire at the mercy of an evening curfew until his 1981 apprehension. Stateside, the killer duo credited as the Hillside Strangler kept women Angelenos terrorized throughout the latter half of the "Me Decade." One sex worker even joined an escort agency specifically in response to the news that a killer was strangling and dumping young sex workers, only to be summoned to her death by the same murderers. The Son of Sam, Ted Bundy – responses to their sprees illuminated how women of the era learned to live in fear. Potential victims

THESE PAGES AND FOLLOWING: SABA (SHAKIRA RAHMAN) AND VAL (ROSE WILLIAMS) NAVIGATE THE DARKNESS IN *THE POWER*.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF RLJE FILMS/SHUDDER

Stare into any gender-focused comments section for too long, and woman-identifying readers risk a cosmic madness as though they've beheld the Great God Pan himself.

tasked with protecting themselves from harm were encouraged — and mandated, in the case of the Yorkshire Ripper — to stay indoors, only going out with male chaperones in the evening and generally making themselves smaller while evil men operated with abandon.

The men of Faith's tale get a different sort of female gaze. From the jump, the male characters occupy default positions to which everyone else has to defer. As Val first enters the building, she has to squeeze her way past a gaggle of center-framed men in white coats, discussing the power outages. Most men in *The Power* are virtually useless, not doing much more than standing around with clipboards while women like the Matron run the whole operation. For all of her hardness, the Matron was responsible for the color-coded orientation of the infirmary floors. During the first onscreen power cut, two active wards housed the most vulnerable: intensive care (to which Valerie is assigned) and the nightingale ward, where a handful of babies need tending. Women watch over both wards on the night shift: no male doctor in sight. It's no wonder that one nurse sits alone reading Stephen King's *Carrie*, "about a girl who's had enough and brings the whole place down."

This space that men occupy so casually (and women so essentially) is also increasingly hostile towards Val, as cruel as a high school classroom. Val's first introduction to the bulk of her co-workers is full of whispers. "That's the new girl." One of the voices tiptoes toward Val to get her attention. She turns and is greeted with a three-pronged spear of

PHOTOS COURTESY OF RLJE FILMS/SHUDDER

curiosity, pity, and judgment. Comfort (Gbemisola Ikumelo), Terry (Nuala McGowan), and Joan (Sarah Hoare) may not be throwing tampons at the young woman, but she's not welcomed with open arms, either.

"You'll find speaking your mind is not popular here, Val," Terry tuts. She proves herself right during the night shift by laughing at Valerie's vulnerable hopes of gaining a found family by working at the Royal Infirmary. The family she finds is cold and callous.

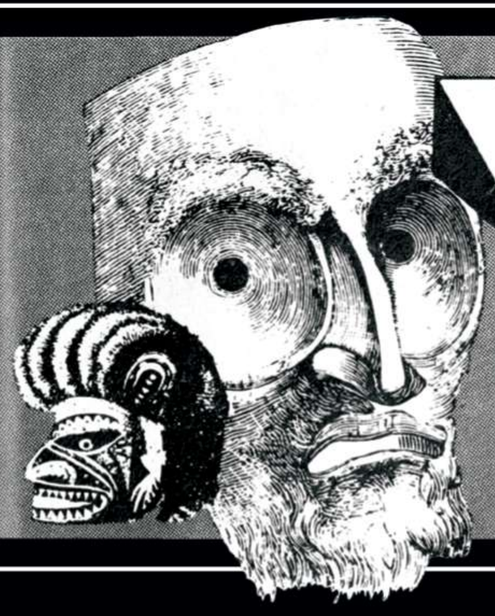
When transitioning from the children's home where she grew up to the working world, the ruthless rationalist Matron sharply asserts that "an iron will" is the answer to guidance for youth, not ideals. A rapid-fire series of rules follows: No sitting on beds; No makeup; Skirts must be three inches below the knee (enforced this with a ruler); Stick to your rank; Never question an order; Don't even speak to the doctors, for "they communicate above your level," Matron says. Finally, the superior delivers an unblinking caveat: "I won't keep you if you don't fit." This need to adapt and assimilate connects *The Power* to *Carrie*, despite being worlds removed from each other.

Carrie, King has said, is his take on *High School Confidential*, wherein a social outsider comes into her power after failing to adapt to the hierarchies of the high school jungle. Faith's efforts occur in adulthood, but strains of that animal kingdom remain in the Royal Infirmary. One of the kinder nurses, Comfort, offers a word: "You're a sweet girl, Valerie, but there's always something trying to control you in a place like this. You have to stop it first day. That's the start of trouble."

Trouble comes immediately with Valerie's shiftmate and resident Mean Girl, Babs (who notably is only seen at night, another one of Val's monsters), who struts in like a domme admonishing the trainee straight away. Barbara goes by Babs now, but fails to respect Val's preferred name, offering an old schoolyard taunt, "Dirty brown… all scrubbed up." Val is stuck and can never advance in her head and the world. She, like Carrie White, will always need extra time in the prayer closet to wash off that filth.

The dark comes amid these heavy social fiascos, and Val's reality seeps in alongside the supernatural elements. But while Carrie uses her telekinetic powers to "bring down the house," Val summons a different sort of vengeful force that might not bring down the infirmary but will certainly reduce that damned, dark prayer closet to rubble.

If you turn on *The Power* for a good old-fashioned spooky story, you'll get your kicks in the third act (which I've tried my best not to touch, lest I ruin your first viewing of this recent release). But Corinna Faith's film oozes with an atmosphere that comes from both its little outcast and the big, bad systems (social and institutional) that aim to keep her powerless. 💀



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BY AHLISSA EICHHORN

PASSERSTHROUGH

DUE OUT:
4/19/2022

AUTHOR:
Peter Rock

PUBLISHER:
Soho Press

Sometimes the past feels too hard to speak about. That's why Benjamin's daughter installed a fax machine in his house, one that translates every spoken word into a transmission she can read at her office. The estranged father still craves insight about what happened to his daughter when she was just a girl, during a shocking camping trip where she disappeared into the wilderness for a week. While in the early stages of dusting off a shelved relationship, Benjamin finds an unlikely friend that leads him to the otherworldly truth of both that fated misadventure and the afterlife itself.

An English professor by day and novelist by (presumably) night, Peter Rock is the author of ten works of fiction (soon to be eleven). *Passersthrough* touches upon the unique trials and rewards a paternal connection brings, with added ingredients including spirit possession, moving lakes full of bones, and murder houses – just for good measure. On the topic of story origins and inspiration, Rock relays:

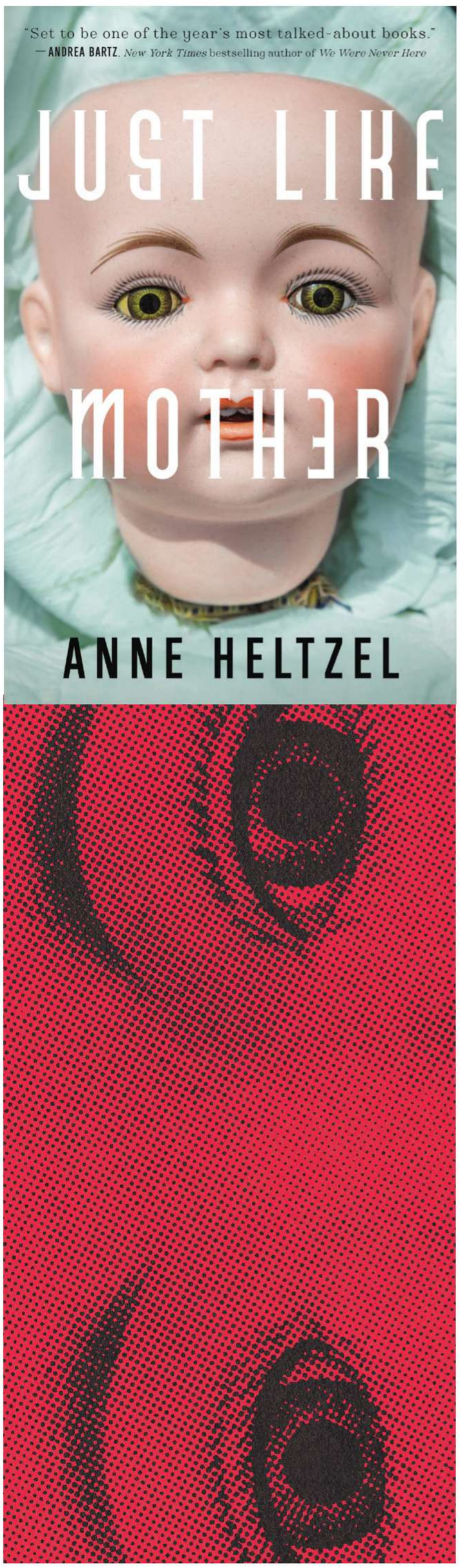
> "Limited and informed by the pandemic and haunted by my father's death, I just wandered around and around my neighborhood, typically attached to my dog. Past Bi-Mart, past the murder house (really bad murders there) with its 7734 address ("Hell" when flipped) changed at the behest of realtors, past burned-out trailers and squatter houses and bike thieves. When the fog and rain and clouds cleared, I could see Mount Hood.
>
> Sometimes I hiked in those wildernesses. I felt like all the times and people of the past were transposed. Sometimes you'll walk into a room and feel the arguments that were just had in that space, in slower motion, the landscape is waiting so full of these lost people and our time is short. And then my daughters at home, growing up and away.
>
> It's surprising to me that [the novel] ended up this way, which is kind of why I write books. I suspect that each successive book is a reaction to the one before, in some way. My last book, *The Night Swimmers*, intersected with my own life — relationships, mysteries, artifacts of my past, my daughters, etc. Here, with *Passersthrough*, I was simply trying to tell the best story I could. I did not want it to be reacting explicitly to personal situations, nor take up any real/historical events, some of the ways my inspiration has reacted in my other works."

The best word to describe *Passersthrough* is dreamlike; it leaves you with a sense that they're not footed in reality, but you can't be bothered to question it. The words are too darting, too cunning to be analyzed, and the characters you meet are both familiar and strange. It's the very human elements presented here that keep you level. Mourning things both alive and dead and accepting hard truths resonate deeply in these pages and will utterly chill you… but contentedly so.

PARENTAL HANG-UPS — WE'VE ALL GOT 'EM, RIGHT?

Navigating life with kids can seem insurmountable. Attempting to understand the people who raised us offers a similarly impossible but valiant goal. These tasks are gratifying, challenging, and most importantly, terrifying in equal measure. Magnify them through a glowering lens of eerie fiction and presto: You've got a new kind of anxiety to medicate!

Here are two tales of parenthood: One paternal, the other maternal. Each is remarkable in their voice, inspirations, and source of chills. Gift them to your folks at your own discretion.


"Set to be one of the year's most talked-about books."
—ANDREA BARTZ, *New York Times* bestselling author of *We Were Never Here*
JUST LIKE MOTHER
ANNE HELTZEL

JUST LIKE MOTHER

DUE OUT:
5/17/2022

AUTHOR:
Anne Heltzel

PUBLISHER:
Tor Nightfire

After years of separation and an extraordinarily complicated childhood, cousins Maeve and Andrea reunite. They're both survivors of the Mothers cult, a religious group that despised men and praised the gift of motherhood. While Andrea enjoys a successful life with her "innovative" family-planning empire and doting husband, Maeve is smothered by terrors of the past and keeps everyone at arm's length. When life begins to beat upon her too hard, Maeve finds refuge with her veneered cousin and attempts to change her perspective for the better. However, the unspoken words between them fester, and soon the illusion of acceptance sulks off as their childhood trauma takes the reins.

Just Like Mother is the debut adult novel from Heltzel, who hails from a background of award-winning ghost writing. She's the current Editorial Director at Abrams Books, where she handles entertainment publishing and children's content development. Her first foray into adult fiction is backed by an inextinguishable enthusiasm for the genre.

Says Heltzel: "I love examining elements of regular life through the lens of horror. Turning everyday horrors into something ludicrous is a lot of fun and gives me control over my anxieties. My writing typically starts with my own fears and evolves into something much more rewarding and playful. In the end, it's not about me at all; it's about the hypothetical readers."

The idea for this novel came from her thirties, a time where she was happily single and felt that, "for possibly the first time ever, I didn't feel like I needed a relationship to validate me. Something inside me had changed for the better, yet friends and family appeared genuinely concerned about the timing of it. I regularly heard, 'Don't worry, there's still time!' (I hadn't been worried), and 'Why are you still single?' It seemed like everyone knew something I didn't about the apparently dire fate of the single and childless. Amplified and in a certain light, it seemed cult-like."

It may be a knee-jerk reaction to say this story casts a harsh light on mothers. After all, women's bodies have been through the wringer, literally and figuratively, since their introduction to the world. The author unrolls heavy thoughts concerning motherhood and womanhood with a disturbing flourish, but assures that the message isn't quite as it seems:

"This book wasn't meant to challenge perspectives, really, although I did reflect a lot on the way women unintentionally contribute to other women's oppression as I wrote. It did occur to me that some readers may interpret it as a critique of motherhood, but that's not the case. It is meant to illustrate how genuinely frightening it is to absorb other people's anxiety as it relates to one's own circumstances."

For many, *Just Like Mother* will read like a real-life horror story. There are ghastly, pregnancy-centric deeds within its contents and warnings are fully warranted, making it a punchy read for genre fans and cult aficionados alike. To others, it offers a lesson in relationships and self-worth, as the characters struggle with definitions of family and choosing which parts of the past are best to let go of.

Contributors' Crypt

Below are social media handles for this issue's contributors. Be cool about it.

Simon Abrams - @simonsaybrams

Abbie Bernstein - @hedgebeast

Matt Black - @mhaydenblack

Barbara Crampton - @barbaracrampton

Lisa Dreyer - @pro_film_freak

Ahlissa Eichhorn - @hauntedeadlines

Brett Gallman - @brettgallman

Jason Kauzkarich - @JasonKauz

Travis Knight - @travbotknight

Joe Lo Truglio - @JoeLoTruglio

Richard Newby - @RICHARDLNEWBY

Phil Nobile Jr. - @PhilNobileJr

Janine Pipe - @JaninePipe28

Anya Stanley - @BookishPlinko

Brandon Streussnig - @BrndnStrssng

T.J. Tranchell - @TJ_Tranchell

Brandon Wainerdi - @ActuallyBrandon

Scott Wampler - @ScottWamplerBMD

Heather Wixson - @thehorrorchick

Things to Come

This summer we bring you both the anticipated and the unexpected, and each one will have its own cover. An iconic filmmaker drops their latest epic, and a horror icon makes their second comeback of the year... it's FANGORIA V2, #16, on shelves and in your mailboxes in July!

CLASSIFIED AD VAULT

Do you like horror? Podcasts? Interviews? Horror interview podcasts??? Listen to Mostly Horror Movie Night!
IG: @mostlyhorrormovienight
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Body horror short Stitches will make you unravel at the seams! Watch for free at bit.ly/WatchStitches

West Midlands, UK based photographer looking for TFP shoots. The more alternative and weird, the better. www.brettsmith.uk

Honk if you love all four dozen AMITYVILLE movies.

DAN "Monsturd" WEST's new 1902 period piece satan indie horror comedy film now in production filming San Francisco Bay Area 2022-2024. Inquire at @cfmceroz1

Looking for a podcast that mixes horror & comedy? Spooky Doings Podcast is hosted by 2 improv comedians discussing horror, conducting interviews & tutorials for the uninitiated. Available on Apples Podcasts, Spotify & Podbean.

Horror for the Casually Obsessed!
Tune into the Nightmare on Film Street Podcast at nofspodcast.com/GO

I know you always combed these classifieds looking for hidden messages, Mitchel. Can't break tradition just yet.

Are you a young filmmaker with a story to tell? Screenager Productions (the team behind SATAN'S SERVANT) wants to develop your short film idea. We're specifically looking for horror shorts set in college. Contact us at screenagerfilms@gmail.com!

AIN'T SLAYED NOBODY is a horror comedy that blends RPG tabletop roleplaying and audio drama. Join the misfit performers of Professor Bleeker's Marvellous Medicine Show, as they investigate the strange occurrences in the Old West, and discover the monstrous darkness dwelling in the torrid sands of Texas. www.aintslayednobody.com

If Disney owns 20th Century Fox, that means they own PHANTOM OF THE PARADISE. Does that mean Phoenix is a Disney Princess now? Think about it.

Looking for cool digital art feat. Demon Babes, Mew Mews, Goddesses, & a Curvy Beauty with a Octopus for a head? Want to support a fun, female, black, graphic designer? Then check out VonniStyle at her shop on Etsy and on Twitter @vonnistyle. You'll be glad you did.

The Frankencast is a podcast about Frankenstein and so much more! Listen weekly wherever you get your podcasts.

Happy first birthday, Lillian Poe!
You'll always be our Great Pumpkin.
Love, Mommy & Daddy

You can't bring yourself to look at this cover, but you're still the strongest gal I know. <3

Do you like movies? Do you like listening to people talk about movies? Yes? Okay! Check out The Dive-In podcast on all platforms hosted by Noah Levine and Quinn Croland. Make sure it's the right one. There's an imposter. Ours is the cool one.

Listen to Giallo of the Month Club for your monthly dose of Italian horror mystery thriller goodness! Available wherever you find your favorite podcasts.
Twitter and IG: @gialloclub

Congrats to three new divers - Arjun, Arianna, Mischa. See you in the deep blue.
Love, Jaws!

If you like behind-the-scenes stories about the making of monsters and movies, TALKING BAY 94 is a 1:1 interview show that focuses on the cast and crew of STAR WARS. Horror highlights: Mick Garris, Phil Tippett. www.starwarspodcast.org

We must not imagine that there is nothing at the bottom of the sea but bare yellow sand.

Shoutout and thank you to Alyssa V for all the support she gives me while I work late nights on this magazine. None of this would be possible without her. ♥♥♥

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